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[☆]

hey yall, welcome to the first book of A Darkening Trance!

The concept of Warriors Cats belongs to Erin Hunter though the book characters, territories, and art, plot is entirely ours and CANNOT be used.

Our book does contain trigger events such as:

- Violence
- Gore
- Blood

Some chapters contain these events and when they do have dark themes, we put a warning. Please do not read these chapters if you feel uncomfortable.

Our book contains LGBTQ+ characters so if you don't support it yourself, please refrain from putting any comments regarding it or your comments will be deleted and you will be blocked for the sake of the books and other readers.

Needless to remind you, our book does contain grammar and typos errors so please excuse us if words are missing or if something is accidentally misspelled!

The order of which books you should read The Darkening Trance would be

- A Trail of Darkness
- The Awakening Storm
- Fading Shadows

We will be having Super Editions and Novels, and Novella that will either follow the events after A Darkening Trance or before. However we still have yet to finish the book and arc.

We hope you enjoy our books as every chapter is filled with action,

angst, and a whole roller coaster of events (just trauma dumping trauma on characters at this point :))

Also to remind you, Caption and I have instagram and a tiktok account based on the ADT. You can see them in our bio along with a discord film group. The film group is mostly based on ADT though we do other films in WCUE. Our server is small at this point so we encourage you to join us as we always need more filming members :)

And now you may proceed, hope you enjoy! <3

Clan Territories

[image]

[image]

Picture of the clans territories are up above! This is the territory that this book will be taking place in and will have similar terms to the ones in the book. The setting takes place in the mountains HOWEVER the territories are big enough to hold the designated original territories(the ones from the books)in here

EX: Windclan has mountain territories as well as a moor territories just like in the book.

Terms and phrases of specific places will definitely be used. Below are the names, where they are located and what their purposes are.

□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Silverpelt - The Silverpelt river got its name after the glitter stars that stretch across the sky at night. It is the main river that helps the clans thrive and breaks off into smaller streams to support the clan.

Training Hollow - This a hollow within the Skyclan camp where apprentices train battle moves. The place is a shallow ditch in the ground with a small broken tree leaning over the hollow and that helps with beginners for tree climbing.

Pointed Claw Rock - This is a territory marker for Skyclan and Thunderclan borders.

Gathering Hill - This is where the clans go for gathering. The place is on top of a hill where a huge pine tree for the leaders to sit and

give the gathering reports. The hill is surrounded by bushes and brambles and a perfect Silverpelt view can be seen from atop.

Moon Cave - This is where medicine cats visit during the full moon to connect to Starclan and for leaders to get their nine lives. The moon cave is located near the Silverpelt. The Moon Cave is located behind a waterfall(after following the river).

Moon Hollow - This place is located within the Moon cave. A small stream goes down to a pool on the bottom where there are paw prints surrounding the pool. There is a crack on top of the cave where the moon light reaches the pool.

***

(More will be added as the book is edited and updated along)

Allegiance — Part One

SkyClan

LEADER: Finchstar - ginger she-cat with green eyes

DEPUTY: Mallowtail - pale ginger tom with white flecks along the pelt

MEDECINE CAT: Parsleyseed - white tom with brown patches

WARRIORS:

Cloudfur - white tom with a graying muzzle and amber eyes
Apprentice, Swiftpaw (lean, muscular black tom with white paws and underbelly)

Stoneheart - gray tabby tom with light blue eyes

Embernose - black tom with blue eyes

Leapflight - light brown she-cat with strong hind legs
Apprentice, Honeypaw (pale ginger she-cat with with light brown eyes)

Mouseclaw - dark brown tom with light brown stripes and hazel eyes

Ravenwing - sleek black tom with amber eyes

Snowpebble - gray tom with white paws and tail with light brown eyes

Dawnsky - black and white tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes

QUEENS:

Willownose - brown tabby she-cat with green-blue eyes(mother of Mouseclaw kits: Leafkit, dark reddish tabby she-kit; Silentkit, a red

molly with lighter reddish orange legs and tails with folded ears)

Petalshade - silver molly with sky blue eyes (mother of Embernose kits: Ivykit, a black and silver tabby she-kit; Blackkit, a black tom with matted, rumpled fur)

ELDERS:

Foxwhisker - dark red tom with hazel eyes

Flowerheart - white she-cat with a black tail and dark amber eyes

Flakenose - dark gray and white she-cat with swirl patterns and blue eyes

Shadowclan

LEADER: Thistlestar - black and white tom with red patches

DEPUTY: Rosewillow - cream brown she-cat with a bushy tail

MEDICINE CAT: Beestripe - white she-cat with yellow stripes

WARRIORS:

Lilywhisper - silver and black tortoiseshell she-cat with light green eyes

Talonclaw - brown tom with scars over his pelt and light yellow eyes

Puddlespot - brown and white tom
Apprentice, Lakepaw (gray tabby she cat with black flecks)

Icestorm - white she-cat with a black chest and a bushy tail

Pinethistle - stocky brown tom with darker brown legs

Oakstep - black tom with a short tail and thick fur around his neck

Sedgecreek - Dappled golden tabby she cat with flecked green eyes

Stormsight - dark gray tom with white legs and green eyes

Apprentice, Shadepaw (black tom with white underbelly, legs, and white tipped tail)

QUEENS:

Silvermist - silver she-cat with dark grey patches (mother of Talonclaw kits, Nightkit, black tabby she-kit; Smokekit, a light brown tabby she-kit with lighter stripes and blue eyes; Thornkit, dark brown tom with lighter stripes and matted fur)

Brindlestone - soft furred, light grey tabby she-cat with brown eyes (expecting Pinethistle kits)

ELDERS:

Tansyleg - white tom with golden patches and green eyes

Patchfur - brown tom with grey ears and paws

Tawneyflick - ginger and black she-cat with yellow eyes

ThunderClan

LEADER: Ashstar - dark grey tom with stocky legs and dark green eyes

DEPUTY: Flashleap - tortoiseshell tom with brown spots and hazel eyes

MEDICINE CAT: Hazelberry - dark brown she-cat with a lighter underbelly and yellow eyes
Apprentice, Mistpaw (grey tom with long legs and white paws and muzzle)

WARRIORS:

Creekpool - golden dappled she-cat with hazel eyes

Brookwater - dappled gray she-cat
Apprentice, Toadpaw (grey tom with emerald green eyes)

Bumblenose - ginger tom with white legs and amber eyes

Wolftalon - long furred, grey tom with blue eyes

Sandstep - cream tabby she-cat with white paws and underbelly and dark brown eyes
Apprentice, Cherrypaw (pale ginger and white she-cat with dark ginger stripes)

Littlefoot - small black tom with a stump for a tail

Palestripe - brown she-cat with swirls and dark blue eyes

Scorchsun - dark brown tom with a faded tail and white muzzle

QUEENS:

Sunnyshine - bright ginger tabby she-cat (mother of Wolftalon kits, Snakekit, a bright ginger she-kit with a white muzzle; Breezekit, dark grey tom; Rowankit, white tom with ginger patches)

ELDERS:

Yellowheart - yellow tom

Shadenose - a dark grey tabby she-cat with one eye

Lizardstripe - brown tom with a gray muzzle with nearly deaf ears

RiverClan

LEADER: Minnowstar - light gray she-cat with darker gray paws and underbelly with green eyes

DEPUTY: Ottervine - dusky drown tom and yellow eyes

MEDICINE CAT: Badgerheart - white and black tom with amber eyes

WARRIORS:

Riversight - blueish gray she-cat with blue green eyes

Aspenfall - white tom with a grayish black tail and amber eyes

Mistyflower - white and black tortoiseshell she- cat with a gray muzzle and amber eyes

Timbershade - black tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Foxpaw (ginger she-cat with green eyes)

Berryhaze - ginger tom with white paws and under belly with amber eyes

Pondleap - Brown she-cat with darker brown stripes on her legs and yellow eyes
Apprentice, Echopaw (grayish white tom with blue eyes)

Crowhiss - jet black tom with light blue eyes

Tinystep - golden she-cat with white stripes along her flank and dashing green eyes

Reednose - grayish blue tom with blue eyes

QUEENS:

Lilacheart - white she-cat with green eyes (mother of Crowhiss kits: Flowerkit, a white she-cat with black patches and light blue eyes; Icekit, a jet black tom with white paws and green eyes)

ELDERS:

Sparrowfang - cranky old tom with a light gray pelt and yellow eyes

Speckledclaw - Dusky brown she-cat with amber eyes

Ambersky - ginger she-cat with amber eyes

WindClan

LEADER: Thymestar - Gray tom with Darker gray flank and green eyes

DEPUTY: Havenfern - Brown she-cat with darker brown stripes and yellow eyes

MEDICINE CAT: Marigoldleaf - golden she-cat with sky blue eyes

WARRIORS:

Ferngaze - pale grey she-cat with darker stripes with brown eyes
Apprentice, Kestrelpaw (black tom with gray paws and spots with yellow eyes)

Ashcloud - gray tom with dark gray flank and blue eyes

Rabbitfoot - Brown tom with darker brown spots on her flank with yellow eyes

Ivywillow - Brown she-cat with white paws and amber eyes

Duskstream - tortoiseshell and white she- cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Valleypaw (light brown she-cat with amber eyes)

Lichensplash - Black tom with brown eyes

Eagletail - Ginger tom with amber eyes

Mintleaf - white she-cat with blue eyes

QUEENS:

Featherfern - white she-cat with dark gray stripes (mother of Eagletail kits: Gingerkit, ginger tom and white tom with blue eyes; Squirrelkit, ginger she-cat with dark ginger stripes and amber eyes)

Frostbite - Whitish gray she-cat (expecting Ashcloud's kits)

ELDERS:

Windheart - old Black tom with a gray muzzle and blue eyes

MossStep - old tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes

Rouges

LEADER: Ezekiel - dark ginger tom with long matted fur and scars covering his flank and yellow eyes

DEPUTIES: Fang - black tom with white stripes and hazel eyes

Foxscar - black tom with darker gray stripes and a huge scar running from her eyes to her flank with yellow eyes

MEMBERS:

Scarlett - black long furred molly with long claws and unusual red eyes

Coal - Black tom with shredded ears and light blue eyes

Ranger - dappled grey tom with aqua green eyes

Moon - Silver she cat with black legs and very light green eyes (sister: midnight)

Midnight - Silver and black molly with dark blue eyes

Flint - ginger and black tom with a torn ear and white tail tip

Prickle - a light grey spikey furred she-cat with blue eyes

Half-face - a bulky, muscular light brown tom with half of its face torn and shredded

Snowflake - white tabby she-cat with green eyes with grey spots flecking her pelt

Flick - mottled dark brown tom with light brown paws and yellow eyes

Matt - light brown tom with dark striped legs and amber eyes

Beetle - gray tom with stump for a tail

Hope - white tabby she-cat with tortoiseshell and ginger patches

Freckles - orange and white she-cat with freckles across the muzzle

Toad - brown tom with slick, smooth fur and light brown paws with sky blue eyes

SHE-CAT WITH KIT(S):

Apple - red she-cat with green eyes (mother of Coals kit: Bee, black she-cat with light blue eyes and a stump tail; Adopted kit, Hawk, white calico she-cat with black and gold markings with fluffy fur and forest green eyes)

Prologue

12/28
[EDITED]

*

Wisps of snow pecked the frostbitten ground. The wind was bitter, rushing through the moor harshly causing Thymestar's pelt to fluff as he winced against the wind. He raised his head against the wind and flicked his tongue out, hoping to catch a scent of prey but there was no avail.

Shuddering, he flattened his ears in worry. His patrol had been tracking for a while but so far they hadn't found any prey.

A thin layer of snow was wilted on the ground and Thymestar assumed the cold and snow was keeping the rabbits underground, away and tucked safely. He lashed his tail and stared into the whitened moor, his gaze darkening. His clan was starving and prey was short, Thymestar knew that he cannot go back to his clan empty handed.

He lifted his head once more, tasting the air when a yowl startled him.

"Thymestar!" A voice yowled from the cold mist. Thymestar twitched his ear at the sound and turned his head.

He saw a cat running over to him. Behind her was two other cats. Thymestar realized that his whole patrol was here. He frowned, confused on why they all were here. The group slowed down and abruptly stopped in front of him, panting.

"What is it?" he asked, staring at Ivywillow as she bent her head, trying to catch her breath.

"We—we found scents at the end of the border," she gasped.

Ashcloud, another member of his patrol butted his head in.

"And they smelled of other cats."

Thymestar narrowed his eyes at them. He had a vague idea of who the scents could be, though he wasn't quite sure. He raised his head once again and scanned the clearing. The snow wasn't falling as hard as it was a few days ago so it would be easier to track the scents.

He then faced his patrol and gave them a solem nod. "Alright, let's go check it out. Make sure to keep yourself alert," he warned. "Anything could happen."

Thymestar then nodded to Ivywillow. "Lead the way," he ordered. Ivywillow flicked her tail and began walking down the direction she came from. Ashcloud and Mintleaf began following as she took the lead.

The patrol scrambled over the rocky territory as it held nothing but blankets and blankets of snow. White coated fields and trees that rested among the frozen ground, where the snow shone as the sun reflected upon them.

Thymestar had to admit that winter had its beauty where it had its flaws. That was the interesting thing about him. He saw all sides to a subject before he made a judgement. Perhaps that is why he is seen as the wisest cat among the clans.

Just as the patrol got nearer to the edge of the territory, he caught a strong scent in the air. He stopped suddenly, causing the other members of the patrol to stop.

"The scent," Mintleaf murmured. "It's gotten stronger."

Thymestar narrowed his eyes against the lining of trees and snow but he couldn't make out anything. He fluffed out his fur and unsheathed his claws. Ivywillow raised her head and tasted the air while Ashcloud unsheathed his claws, growling into the midst.

Thymestar's pelt prickled as he felt uneasy among the border. He felt as if there was something watching him, but he couldn't make

out what it is. All he did know was that there was another cat scent here. The patrol wearily looked around but to no avail.

"Stay sharp," Thymestar warned, pricking his ears. "It could be an ambush."

Just as the words flew out of his mouth, a bloodcurdling cry screamed into his ears causing the group to jump suddenly. Thymestar flattened his ears and whipped around, his eyes wide as he saw huge cats circling the group from behind.

"AMBUSH!" Ashcloud cried just as a huge dark grey tom threw themselves on top of him. Thymestar let out a alarmed yowl and flung himself at the dark grey tom.

He locked his forearms against the tom's throat and tore him off Ashcloud. Instantly, the tom whipped around and swiped at Thymestar's muzzle causing him to screech in pain. Growling, he slammed one of his hind legs onto the tom's face and sent him rolling down the ground.

Just as Thymestar was about to attack again, another cat flung themselves onto him. He let out a yelp of pain as they scratched his back.

Hissing in fury, Thymestar hooked his hind leg under the cats foot and shoved it making him crash. Thymestar instantly scrambled up and pinned the cat down before adding a few blows to the tom's shoulder.

The patrol struggled to defend themselves from the ambush as more and more cats appeared and started attacking them.

Thymestar could see his group was getting exhausted even though they were refusing to give up.

He knew that if they kept fighting they would get killed but running away means defeat and allow their clan to be a threat to danger.

He couldn't allow that.

StarClan gave him nine lives for a reason, if he had to use every one

of them to protect his classmates and his clan, then he would.

Lifting his chin, Thymestar snarled at the rouge that had faced him. The two lunged at each and crashed to the ground in a furry of pelt and claws. As he fought, he could hear the screeches of his classmates fighting.

Growling, he wrestled with the tabby and yowled. He pulled back and slammed his paw into the tabby cheeks and sent it reeling backwards. It let out a cry of agony and stumbled away. Thymestar gasped for breath when suddenly something grabbed his shoulders and shoved him into the ground. He let out a shocked screech and felt his muzzle being shoved into the dirt.

His chest heaved as he fought for breath but to no avail. Spots danced in his vision as he breaths suddenly grew weaker and weaker.

This is it, he thought. Gasping, Thymestar closed his eyes until the weight on top of him vanished. His mouth flew open with sudden shock and gasped in relief as he could finally breathe. His chest fought for breath as he heard fierce snarling and high-pitched shrieks.

Grunting in surprise, Thymestar scrambled up, staggering slightly, and saw that there was another WindClan patrol fighting off the rouges. They bared their teeth and swiped at any cats nearby.

Panting, Thymestar joined his clanmates in pushing the rouges back. The rouges snarled and screeched however slowly backed away with quivering tails and flattened ears.

Just then, a huge dark ginger tom with long, ruly matted fur that was covered in scars pushed his way up to the front of the group of rouges.

He lifted his chin and bared his teeth at Thymestar.

"I never knew that the clan cats were a bunch of weaklings," he sneered. "I thought they were honorable, skilled cats known for their courage in a battle yet they are nothing but skinny, puny,

worthless cats."

Ashcloud, who stood beside Thymestar, snarled at the tom and stepped forward threateningly. "Thymestar—"

Thymestar raised his tail and Ashcloud clamped his mouth shut, though his eyes were sparking in rage.

The dark ginger tom unsheathed his claws and stared at the grey tom for a moment longer before waving his tail.

"Lets go!" he yowled. He then turned back around and faced the cats with blazing eyes.

"This is not the last time you'll see us," he growled and narrowed his eyes. "Next time be more prepared, because if not, you have more things at stake and we have never shown mercy."

With that, the tom flicked his tail and in a blink of an eye, his figure disappeared along with the rest of the cats.

Thymestar panted and shook his fur. "Thymestar?"

He looked up and saw his deputy, Havenfern walking over to him with a concerned look in her eyes.

"We were hunting over the moors when, Duskstream heard screeching and yowling over the ridge," she explained. "Thats when we saw you guys fighting with . . . rouges?"

He nodded and touched the she-cat's flank with the tip of his tail. "Thank you," he murmured gratefully.

"From now on, put extra patrols and have the camp guarded by all times," he told Havenfern. She gave him a nod.

"Of course," she mewed. She quickly went over to Thymestar's side and supported him.

"Lets go," he rasped and the group began walking to camp.

As Havenfern helped him scramble over the sharp ridges, toward

the direction of the camp, his mind swirled with endless thoughts.

These rouges, he thought, his fur prickling. *They're nothing like the ones we've usually fought. They have a motive, they have a* reason.

Thymestar halted, his head pointed up to the dark, misty clouds. Havenfern stopped walking, her gaze suddenly confused.

"Thymestar?" she meowed anxiously. "Is something wrong?"

Thymestar didn't hear her. Instead, he continued staring up at the sky.

Dark times are coming. I can feel it through my bones. These rouges will stop at nothing—only someone can bring them down, if not me or any leader.

Thymestar turned to Havenfern. "Something tells me, this is only the beginning of our troubles. Like a trail that is slowly being darkened as we follow," he murmured. "These rouges will bring us plenty of trouble, but there's more to come. A whole darkening storm."

Havenfern only blinked, her eyes glittering with worry but she didn't say a word as she gave Thymestar a nudge. "Come on, it's freezing out here," she urged. "You need to get to Marigoldleaf to get those wounds checked."

Thymestar blindly padded on besides the brown tabby she-cat, often receiving a nudge when he strayed too far in one direction. The camp entrance suddenly came to view, and Thymestar found his strength to no longer lean on his deputy.

They're coming for us.

Battles are drawn.

***

4/3/23
UPDATE:

Hi everyone! I just want to let you all know that at the beginning of each chapter we will be putting the date for every day that happens to take place during that chapter. This is for the sake of us authors so we are able to keep track of the time and season, and also to help you fellow readers!

Just for a clarification, and not to confuse it as the day it was published or edited—it is the timeline for the book!

—Fox/Cloudy <3

01 | outside

[image]

[EDITED]

*

(a/n: the clan territories picture ^)

12/31

S I L E N T

The pale light of the sun flashed onto my face through the nursery entrance. I hissed and buried my face in my paws. My tail twitched in annoyance as Leafkit rolled over and against my side. I shoved her away from me and stretched. I blinked open my eyes and saw the entrance of the nursery.

Just a quick look, I thought as I jumped quietly out of Willownose's nest.

I was about to walk threw the entrance when something stopped me, I turned around and saw Willownose staring at with her sharp gaze.

"Where do you think your going?" she mewed picked me up by my scruff and carrying me back to our nest despite my mews of protest.

Willownose laid me back down in our nest and started grooming my fur.

"Stop!" I tried to move away from her slimy tongue, but to no avail. My movements must have woken up Leafkit because she was now yawning and stretching besides us.

"Morning!" she mewed, her tail high in the air.

"Morning, Leafkit," Willownose said fixing the last of my messy fur.

I jumped away from Willownose as soon as she stopped licking. "I can groom myself!" I mewed loudly.

"Shut up, Silentkit!" Blackkit snapped loudly at me from his shared nest with Ivykit and Petalshade.

"Yeah! Willownose should have named you Loudkit!" Ivykit yelped from behind her brother. The sun flashed through the entrance of the nursery, and I could just make out Petalshade's silver pelt with Ivykit's black and silver tabby fur as well as Blackit's black matted pelt.

"*Shush!* You should have been named Foxdungkit!" I said loudly. Willownose came over to me and wrapped her tail over my muzzle.

"That's enough! For all of you," Willownose said firmly.

"What's going on here?" A tom voice asked from the entrance of the nursery. I whipped around and saw Mouseclaw poking his head into the nursery.

"Mouseclaw!" Leafkit and I yowled together, and both ran over to our father and rubbed against his front legs.

I looked up at him and saw him nuzzling Willownose. Mouseclaw's dark brown tabby pelt shined in the dawn sunlight while his sky blue eyes sparkled while looking at Willownose. I nipped his forearm and spoke when he looked down at me. "Can me and Leafkit go outside the nursery? Please!" I asked, giving Mouseclaw and Willownose the cute eyes

Mouseclaw laughed and turned to Willownose. "Come on let them have fun, you don't stay kits for long," Mouseclaw mewed. Willownose was hesitant but agreed. Before I could run out of the nursery Mouseclaw grabbed me by my scruff.

"Wait its dangerous to just run outside!" Mouseclaw mewed. I huffed in annoyance and flailed my legs.

Willownose picked up Leafkit and we headed for the entrance. Excitement flooded my paws as we stepped into the sunlight, I looked down and saw a huge drop. I squeaked in surprise as

Mouseclaw slowly started climbing down some boulders. When we got to the bottom, I realized that our camp was coated with white stuff that seemed to have hid the other dens among the rock slide

"Where are the other dens!?" I asked looking up at Mouseclaw. He laughed at my cluelessness and pointed with his tail to the highest point of the rockslide

"That's Finchstar's den." Then he pointed to a lower hole in between the rocks

"That's the warriors den, where I sleep." Mouseclaw continued to point to dens all over to rockslide, he pointed to one that was on the right side and of the rockslide and about hid way up the rockslide "That's the apprentice den."

Next, he pointed to a den that was a few boulders under Finchstar's den. "That's the nursery."

He then turned to a point to a hole in the rocks that was at the very bottom of the rockslide "That's the Elders den."

Lastly he pointed to a den that was below the apprentice den "And lastly, that's the medicine cat den."

I stared at the different dens and watched as cats came out of them. "But why do we live so high up?" Leafkit asked tilting her head to the side

"It's a way of defense, all the clans specialize in something. Skyclan's ability is to jump high," Mouseclaw explained. He turned around and I saw he was looking at a wall of thorn bushes lined with trees, they surrounded the rocksilde "We have the thorn bush wall incase any of the other clans try to invade our camp."

"Don't worry, if the other clans come we'll shred them!" A voice declared behind us. I turned and saw the clan's two apprentices, Swiftpaw and Honeypaw. Swiftpaw's black fur was puffed out and spiking while Honeypaw's pale ginger fur was flat, though her whiskers twitched with amusement.

"Don't worry, Mouseclaw, if any other clans come here, me and

Honeypaw will protect Silentkit and Leafkit!" Swiftpaw mewed proudly and jumped onto a leaf on the ground. His tail swished noisily, giving off his grubby skills.

"You'll never be able to sneak up on your enemy if you keep making so much noise," a scratchy tom voice hissed. I looked towards the voice and saw Cloudfur, Swiftpaw's mentor, coming out from the warriors den. His white tabby fur was messy as he sat in front of the warriors den and started grooming off the clumps.

"Sorry Cloudfur!" Swiftpaw yowled to Cloudfur who in return growled with a much bitter annoyance glittering from his eyes.

"Stop yowling across the camp!" Parsleyseed shouted from his den, the white tom with brown patches walked out of his den and I could see some herbs stuck in his fur. "Some cats are sleeping from the gathering last night! Have some respect!" Parleyseed snapped.

I leaned over towards Leafkit and whispered, "The whole mountain range woke up after that." Leafkit let out a small *mrrow* of laughter, ducking her head to hide it.

"You can definitely tell they are brothers," she whispered to me and we both giggled to ourselves.

Parleyseed went back into his den to sleep as did Cloudfur while Swiftpaw and Honeypaw remained where they were. "Come on Honeypaw, I think I saw some voles drinking at the river earlier," Swiftpaw mewed and the two apprentices ran out of the camp, their pelts brushing side by side as they left.

"Don't be gone for long!" Honeypaw's mentor, Leapflight, called out to the pair from where she sat next to Stoneheart. The two were grooming each other near the fresh-kill pile.

"We won't," Honeypaw meowed over her shoulder.

I turned and watched them sprint through the thorn tunnel. "Mouseclaw, can we go outside the camp?" I asked. However, Mouseclaw didn't get to reply before Willownose did.

"Oh StarClan, no! You're far to young—you're only 4 moons old!"

Willownose explained. I grunted, but didn't say anything. "Come, it's time to go back to the nursery!"

* * *

"Take this ShadowClan rat!" Leafkit yowled lunging at a leaf that was on the ground. When Leafkit was focused just on the leaf, I leaped and slammed her to the ground, and laughed loudly.

"Take that ThunderClan fox-heart!" I sneered. Leafkit wiggled out from under my paws and slapped me with her tail.

"I'm not a ThunderClan cat!" She retorted fiercely at me "Maybe not, but you are full of foxdung!" I was about to throw myself at Leafkit when something rammed into my side and I fell down on the ground.

I looked to see who pushed me and saw Blackkit with his tail high in the air. "Ha, take that Loudkit!" Blackkit spat at me. I hissed and leaped at him. We rolled together on the grass until we crashed into someone and fell apart from each other. When I looked up I saw Mallowtail, the SkyClan deputy. Swiftly, I scrambled to my paws and dipped my head apologetically.

"Sorry Mallowtail!" I squeaked, shaking dirt from my pelt.

"It's fine Silentkit, but how about you and Blackit play somewhere else? How about over by the elders den . . . yes, go on," Mallowtail told us, swishing his tail before us.

I hurried back over to Leafkit who was now talking to Flowerheart one of the clan elders. Flowerheart's white pelt glowed in the sun light while her black tail stayed at her side.

"And then, *splash*! Me and the fox went rolling into SilverPelt River. We were fighting each other *and* the water!" Leafkit was listening closely to Flowerheart's story, her tail twitching from side to side.

"How did you get out of the water?" Leafkit asked.

"Well first I had to—"

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey join here beneath the rockslide for a Clan meeting!" Finchstar's call was heard from all over the camp. I jolted up and spun around looking for Finchstar—when I saw her outside of her den, standing over everyone in camp. I hurried over to where Mouseclaw was and sat behind him so I could get a good view of Finchstar, her ginger pelt burned in the sun light and her green eyes shimmered brightly from the rays, illuminating the forest that shone deeply within her eyes.

I wonder what's going on, I thought sitting down, Leafkit hurried over to me and we both waited for everyone to come outside. Besides Mouseclaw sat Stoneheart, a gray tom, while on the other side of Mouseclaw, was Leapflight. I saw Mallowtail jumping up from the ledge he stood and sat just below Finchstar. Cloudfur and Parsleyseed slowly approached closer to the ledge. Willownose was sitting close by us with Petalshade, Blackit, and Ivykit.

Embernose went to go sit besides his mate while Snowpebble, Dawnsky, and Ravenwing sat at the edge of the clearing. Foxwhisker and Flowerheart sat outside their den looking up at Finchstar.

Behind us, the. thorn bush rustled revealing the two apprentices coming back from their eventful trip. Their jaws were full of voles, which they hurriedly placed on the fresh-kill pile before joining to sit beside their mentors.

When everyone was seated Finchstar began to speak. "Earlier this morning the dawn patrol returned with some interesting news. Snowpebble, would you like to tell the clan what your dawn patrol found out?" She flicked her tail to the gray tom below.

Snowpebble nodded to his leader and walked to the center of the clearing, the toms gray fur white paws and tail shown in the day light. He sat looking up at Finchstar and starting speaking. "My dawn patrol was patrolling the ThunderClan border when we over heard some ThunderClan cats talking about how the WindClan cats were attacked by a small clan of rouges. No cat was dead, but the WindClan warriors suffered serious injuries," Snowpebble explained when Embernose butted in.

"So? its WindClan we don't need to worry about those rabbit chasers," the black tom snapped. "We don't even have a border with them."

Finchstar turned towards the tom, her pelt fluffed out and her eyes blazing. "If WindClan was attacked then there is a chance the rouges will come here! It could mean a bad thing if ThunderClan is worried about it and WindClan falls on the other side of the river," the SkyClan leader hissed. "We must stay alert. Mallowtail, I want extra patrols and one guard will be assigned every night."

Mallowtail nodded his head in understanding. "Very well," he replied.

Finchstar flicked her tail at her deputy and senior warriors "I also want every apprentices to be accompanied by a warrior when leaving the camp." Her gaze fell upon Honeypaw and Swiftpaw. "Is that clear?"

They both nodded though they looked reluctant to do so.

"Then the meeting dismissed!" she yowled, going back into her den, her deputy and senior warrior shortly following after her.

I was about to turn to Leafkit when I noticed she wasn't by my side anymore, I looked around and saw her talking to Flowerheart again. I walked over and sat besides Leafkit.

"Has rouges every attacked a clan patrol like this before?" I asked Flowerheart. The old she-cat looked at me before speaking. "Rouges have threatened the clans for season upon seasons, but it must be bad if ThunderClan makes it sound bad. They are always so mighty and nosey. We can only hope those rouges don't come here," Flowerheart explained before walking back into the elders den.

I turned to look at Leafkit. "Do you want some fresh kill? I saw Swiftpaw and Honeypaw bring back plenty of voles!" I asked licking my lips at the thought of the having voles. Leafkit looked at me before nodding and we both ran over to the fresh kill.

02 | threat

[EDITED]

*

12/31

L E A F

Silentkit rushed over to the fresh-pile leaving me in the cold. Sighing, I got up from my spot and padded after her. As I walked, a bitter wind rushed into my fur instantly fluffed out against the brutally cold wind that was pulsing around the camp. Shaking out my fur, I began walking over to the fresh-pile kill where Swiftpaw and Honeypaw were pulling out large, yet skinny voles from the pile.

"Hey, why don't you guys take those voles over to the elders?" I heard a voice call out. I looked around and saw Leapflight, Honeypaw's mentor, gracefully leap over to the two apprentice.

"Sure!" Swiftpaw mewed. "I'm sure they'll appreciate the voles I caught."

Honeypaw narrowed her eyes at the tom. She growled and swiped at Swiftpaw while glaring at him. "I helped you catch that, you fox pelt!"

Swiftpaw ducked her swipe and purred teasingly. "Sure you did, sure."

He flicked her shoulder before picking up the voles in his jaws and walked over to the elders den. I heard Honeypaw sigh before she padded after the tom.

"I'm really gonna kill him one day," she muttered though her eyes held a glint of amusement.

"Also," Leapflight added, making Honeypaw halt in her tracks. "When you're done, I want you to a join border patrol with me and Mouseclaw."

Honeypaw gave a nod at the light brown she-cat before she turned around and bounded after Swiftpaw.

I turned around from the commotion and continued my way to the fresh-kill pile. Suddenly, a rush of wind barreled into me causing me to yelp slightly. I shivered from the iciness and fluffed my fur out to keep warm.

Grunting, I ran over to Silentkit who was sniffing the fresh-kill pile.

"Mmm!" Silentkit squeaked eagerly as she stuffed her muzzle into the pile. She hooked out a mouse from the pile. "Lets share!"

"Sure," I responded and padded over to her side and knelt down. I took a bite from the mouse and chewed on the meat. Lifting my head, I examined the camp beside us. The air was cold and bitter though huddling beside Silentkit made it bearable.

The sun streaked over the bright blue sky, as if it was welcoming everyone it saw. A few clouds were marked over the sky where they made weird shape as they slowly went by. I bent down and took another bite from the mouse, watching as everyone was content in the camp. Though it felt weird since Finchstar said there were rouges around and ordered for more patrols and guards.

"Why are you so quiet?"

Silentkit's voice suddenly snapped me out of my trance and made me look at her. I shrug.

"I'm usually quiet," I mewed.

"No, you're not," Silentkit objected and flicked her ear. "You can be just as loud as me!"

I looked at Silentkit and gave her a skeptical glance. "Funny, you're name is Silent anyways." Silentkit perked up and glared at me. "My name has nothing to do with me!" she snapped angrily.

"Of course, of course," I purred, amused before biting into the mouse.

"Hmph." Silentkit took an angry bite into her mouse before muttering. "Everyone always has a statement about my name."

"Why were you named Silentkit?" I suddenly asked which caught the attention of Silentkit. We gave each other a look.

"Let's go ask mom!" Silentkit mewed and I nodded. The two of us finished off the mouse and got up. We padded across the camp and walked over to the nursery where Willownose and Petalshade were grooming each other.

Willownose perked up when she saw the two of us running over to her. "Hello my darlings," she purred and touched both of our noses when we halted in front of her.

"What brings you here?" she questioned. Petalshade looked up from where she was licking Willownose's pelt, her whiskers twitching.

"Well, I had a ques—" Silentkit started. I frowned and gave her a light shove causing her to get startled.

"I mean! *We* had a question about something," Silentkit mewed before giving me a glare. I met her stare with a calm look. Silentkit scowled at me and gave me a light shove before turning back to Willownose. I grumbled under my breath.

"Ask away dear," Willownose respond. Petalshade stopped grooming Willownose and was now resting beside her, watching Blackkit and Ivykit play with a moss-ball.

"Why was I named Silentkit? Everyone always says that I should be named 'loudkit' or that I'm so loud for my name!" Silentkit complained and fluffed out her fur. She lifted her paw unhappily and slapped it to the ground.

A few specks of dust arose into the air causing Silentkit to wheeze a little. I noticed this and cringed away.

Ew, I don't want to breathe in that and started sneezing, I thought and

wrinkled my nose.

Willownose thought for a moment before answering. "Well my dears, when she-cats give birth to kits, it's usual for the kits start crying the moment they are born. When Leafkit was born, she cried alright, much that StarClan most likely heard her," Willownose teased and flicked her tail at my ear. Her eyes were filled with amusement which caused my ears to burn from embarrassment.

I glared at her while Silentkit gave me a shove. "Haha, I told you," she whispered while snickering.

"Shut up before I shred your ears!" I hissed to her and gave her shoulder a slight nudge.

"However," Willownose continued, "when Silentkit was born, she didn't cry nor scream. At first, Parsleyseed thought you were dead since you barely made any noise. However he detected that you were breathing so he began rubbing you in order to make you warm. And then, you finally did start crying. That's why I named you Silentkit," Willownose finished.

"Wow, I died and became alive again!" Silentkit squealed and jumped around. "So cool!"

I rolled my eyes. "Sure, you're a StarClan cat now! All hail, Silentkit of StarClan," I grumbled sarcastically. Willownose purred softly. She then bent down and nudged both of us.

"Now, go play," she mewed. "I'm going to call you guys in when it's too cold to play out so play all you want for now."

Willownose then turned around and began to talk with Petalshade.

"Let's go," Silentkit urged and I got up and began walking out of the nursery. As we walked out, Silentkit was jumping from StarClan knows what.

"Ha! At least I wasn't the loudest when I was born," she mewed haughtily causing my fur to bristle.

"Shut up! Willownose said that all kits cry," I retorted fiercly.

"But I didn't," Silentkit pointed out.

"Yeah, I know!" I rolled my eyes good humorously. It wasn't Silentkit if she wasn't constantly picking on me, and we aren't sisters if we aren't constantly arguing over the most insignificant issies. Sighing, I flicked my tail. "C'mon lets go play."

Silentkit nodded eagerly. "Okay!"

* * *

"Catch this, Leafkit!" Silentkit yowled before smacking the mossball over to me. I narrowed my eyes and lunged after the mossball. I scrambled over the ground and managed to catch the mossball between my paws.

"Caught it!" I yelled before positioning myself to hit the ball over to her.

"You won't catch it this time!" I heard her yowl. I stifled a snort.

"Yeah and hedgehogs fly. You have been saying the same thing every time," I grumbled. I lifted my paw and smacked the ball right back to Silentkit.

She managed to catch it and squealed as she did. She was just about to throw it back to me when a yowl made me freeze in my tracks. I saw Silentkit do the same thing.

I turned my head at the sound, startled and frightened. My fur bristled at the noise and my ears perked up. I was also not the only one alerted by the sudden noise. The whole camp had heard it.

The remaining warriors that were left in the camp instantly sprang up at the sound. Mallowtail scrambled down the rockslide from where he was talking with Finchstar. Finchstar had risen from where she was resting and had her ears drawn towards the cacophony.

Petalshade grabbed her kits who were playing right outside the nursery and ducked inside while Swiftpaw was nudging the elders into their den, keeping himself alerted.

Silentkit dropped the moss-ball and padded over to my side. I could feel her shaking softly as our pelts brushed.

"What's going on?" she whispered to me. I flattened my ears and pressed closer to her.

"I don't know."

Just then three cats bursted from the entrance and crashed into the camp, disrupting the eerie silence within the camp. Silentkit gasped and I shut my eyes drowning out all the noises.

"Mouseclaw!" I heard Silentkit cry out. I quickly snap my eyes open and saw three cats stumbling into the camps leaving a trail of blood behind them. And one of them was Mouseclaw.

My gaze slowly made over to him and horror struck me as if a serpent was coiling in my stomach ready to strike. I was tempted to look away, but my eyes were glued to him. I simply could not look away from such horror.

His pelt was shredded with tufts of fur clinging off his back and red drops of scarlet blood slowly dripped to the ground making a huge red stain. He limped heavily and his ears were torn. Every part of his body were clawed with hideous marks making me whimper in fear. I had never seen any injuries this terrible let alone Mouseclaw getting them.

If that was the worst, it wasn't.

Leapflight limped down the rockpile struggling to hold herself and another cat. Snowpebble made his way over to them, and allowed support to help carry the other cat. It then dawned upon me that the cat was Honeypaw. As soon as she came into view, I couldn't suppress a gasp of disgust and terror that struck me when I looked at her.

The she-cat was barely moving and I would've mistaken her as dead if it weren't for the slight rise and fall of her chest. A huge scar that ran from her back all the way to her stomach leaving me completely frozen in place. I felt Silentkit tremble beside me as she

watched the she-cat get dragged into the camp.

"I can't look," she mumbled to me and pointed her muzzle down to the ground. I couldn't either and felt sick to the stomach as a trail of gore was littered on the camp grounds.

The two of us were pressed together into a mold of fur. One could mistaken us as one cat instead of two.

Leapflight and Snowpebble were able to make it to the camp. A loud commotion now settled into the camp as the two made their way to the center. Leapflight was just as badly injured as Mouseclaw though the onslaught of blood made me think otherwise.

Finchstar squeezed through the crowd forming around the three cats and I watched as a shock lifted upon her face.

"Great StarClan," she whispered. "What happened?"

"Rouges happened," Leapflight gasped. She was knelt over Honeypaw and had to tilt her head in order to look at Finchstar.

"We were paroling around the mountain ridges when Honeypaw said she smelled a shrew around the corner. I allowed her to hunt it. However, a few moments after she went after it, I heard shrieks and yowling so Mouseclaw and I went to check out what was happening and saw that she was getting attacked by rouges." Leapflight shook her head, her voice cracked with exhaustion. "There were so many of them. We couldn't fend them all off. I don't even know—"

Leapflight broke off and hung her head in anguish.

Finchstar was about to say something when Parsleyseed nosed his way into the semi-circle that had formed. He had a bundle of herbs in his jaws and dropped them beside Honeypaw. He sniffed the she-cat and rolled her over to examine the huge scar around her flank. All this time, he did not flinch one bit from the hideous scar.

"Move," he suddenly snapped and glared at the crowd. "I can't do anything with everyone looming over like some thicket. Also, I need

two cats to help me bring her to my den."

"Everyone head back. Snowpebble, Stoneheart, I need you to help bring Honeypaw to the Parsleyseed's den," Finchstar ordered. Snowpebble and Stoneheart padded forward over to Honeypaw. I watched as they both pushed their muzzle underneath Honeypaw's body and began to half-drag, half-carry her to the den.

"Hurry!" Parsleyseed ordered. "She's losing blood and I need to close it as soon as possible."

Swiftpaw, who was on the side, was watching Honeypaw get carried away.

"Honeypaw!" Swiftpaw whispered. His eyes were round and I saw the dread forming in his eyes. He stood where he was, frozen to the ground as if roots had curled around his paws and planted themselves there. Cloudfur padded up to the tom and gave him a gentle nudge.

"C'mon," he murmured softly. "Parsleyseed will do his best to save Honeypaw. For now, go back to your den."

Swiftpaw hung his head and slowly retreated up the rockslide towards the dens.

Suddenly, I felt someone nudge my flank causing me to jump away and stumble backwards. Silentkit yelped beside me and back away.

"Kits!" Willonose cried. "There you are." She gave us both an affectionate lick and nudged us toward the dens. "Come on, lets head back to the nursery. You two are freezing cold."

She swept her tail behind as and ushered us to carefully take our step. I mindlessly stumbled into the clearing giving her a puzzled glance. It then dawned upon me that my entire body was numb from the shock and cold. We walked through the clearing and soon enough entered the nursery. The sudden lush of nursery smell made me shudder.

Willownose nudged us to our nest and gave us a worried glance. "You're alright, aren't you darlings?" She asked anxiously. She

padded up to us and gave both our ears a loving lick.

She nestled closer to us and pressed my cold body against her warm ones.

"Yes," I mewed and turned my head to look at Silentkit. She was curled up beside me and didn't say anything to Willownose's questions. I then looked at her. "Is Mouseclow going alright?"

Willownose looked at me and then gave a slow nodded that then turned into a vigorous nodding. "Of course he will," she murmured though I could hear the worry in her voice.

Willownose then quietly got up and walked out of our nest. I lifted my head and stared at her.

She turned around and gave me a quick glance. "I'll—I'll be right back," she said quickly. I narrowed my eyes and nodded, deciding to not ask anything since I already know where she was going.

Willownose walked out of the den leaving us with Petalshade and her kits. Petalshade was urging her kits to sleep and I twitched my ears in surprise. I turned away from them and closed my resting my head on my paws. I felt Silentkit shift beside me

"Leafkit," she whispered. I flicked my ear in response.

"Hm?"

There was a pause before Silentkit continued. "Lets go to the medicine cat den," Silentkit said causing me to sit up. I did not expect that.

"What? Why?"

"I need to know on what's going on," she mewed and sat up. She shook her pelts where a few moss flung to the side.

"How very heroic of you," I murmured.

Silentkit looked at me and prodded my flank. "Don't you want to know what in the name of StarClan is going on?"

I lifted my head only for a moment before resting it back on my paws. "I do," I admit after a moment.

"And I want to see if Mouseclaw is okay," she added.

"Do you suggest we stroll out of the nursery without Petalshade catching us?"

"I have an idea. But anyway, there's a hole in Parsleyseed's den that I found when I grabbed some moss for the moss ball. It's big enough for us to poke our heads in and be able to see."

I heaved a sigh, whiskers twitching as I thought this over. This made no sense but then again I didn't want Silentkit to be left alone. Whatever she does, we do together.

"Okay," I mewed and got up. I shook my pelt causing bits of moss to drop back down. "Let's go."

Silentkit gave a excited nod and padded over to Petalshade. The she-cat was hushing Blackkit and Ivykit into sleep and didn't even notice us approach her.

"Petalshade?"

Petalshade snapped her head up and gave us an irritated glance. "What is it?"

"We left our moss-ball outside and thought if we can grab it so we can play it here?"

"Shouldn't you kits be sleeping?"

"We're too old for napping," Silentkit protested. Petalshade glanced at us, though her gaze was distracted. "Fine, go."

The two of us were about to rush out of the den when a silver tail stopped us. "However, you two will come back," she warned. "If I don't see you guys back after a while, I will tell Willownose."

I nodded and gave Petalshade an earnest glance. "We will," I promised. Petalshade nodded and then curled around her kits.

Silentkit gave me a glance where her eyes shone from victory. "Lets go," she whispered and the two of us padded out of the den.

Only to get in trouble.

03 | sneaking

[EDITED]

*

12/31

S I L E N T

Whiskers twitching, me and Leafkit stumbled out of the nursery. I let out a sigh of relief once we were out of the nursery. I had a feeling that Petalshade wouldn't allow us to go out, but much to our surprise she did.

"Phew, I thought she would say no," I mewed as I halted. Giving my pelt a shake, I turned to face Leafkit whom also halted and was now facing me. Her whiskers trembled as a harsh wind rolled by causing our fur to be rumpled and fluffed out.

Great StarClan, when does the wind ever stop howling? I thought with an annoyed flick of my ear. *It seems to enjoy to watch cats suffer under their cold, bitter wrath.*

"I'm surprised she said yes," Leafkit suddenly meowed. I looked up from where I was licking my fur and blinked at her. "I mean, why would she let two kits into the coldness *and* not mention she knew that Willownose told us to stay here?" she prompted and gave me a puzzled look.

I shrugged, not really minding. *Not that I even know of.*

"I don't know, but she did look distracted," I mewed which earned a sharp look from Leafkit. I lifted my tail and waved it, already dismissing what I said. "Anyways lets go before someone catches us."

I spun around and was about to sprint to the medicine cat den when I felt someone crash into my side and pin me onto the ground. I

hissed in surprise and lifted my head to see Leafkit's light green blue eyes glaring into mine.

"Wha—"

"Are you seriously going to sprint across the camp and expect no one to notice us?" Leafkit hissed, her voice hard. At the sudden thought, my ear tips burned for the realization and I flattened my ears against my head. However, I didn't waver and glared back into Leafkit's glaring eyes.

"Yeah?"

"Fur brain!" Leafkit hissed and gave my ears a cuff before scrambling off of me. I got up and shook my ruffled fur, only to make it more messier.

"Look at what you did, you bee brain!" I complained and gave my chest a couple of licks. I licked my paw and brought it over my face, smoothing down the ruffled fur.

Leafkit gave me an irritated glance. "Bee brain yourself! You're the one who came up with the idea so why don't you try thinking for once?"

I gave my pelt a final shake and sat down.

We were sitting in the corner of the nursery's where the brambles—thankfully—shaded us and gave us cover from another cats view. I suddenly wanted to thank Leafkit into pushing me under a bramble.

"Okay," I started. I stopped and thought for a moment, whiskers twitching as I tried to think of a way to get into the medicine cat den while not getting captured. "How about we stay near the brambles, or under the shelter of the brambles to stay hidden from cats views? So then we can go to the den without being captured!"

I finished off with a lash of my tail and turned to Leafkit who was sitting a few mouse-tail lengths away from me.

She looked at me and gave me a satisfied nod. "Okay, we can go for it."

I nodded and gave an excited squeak. "Let's go then!"

Leafkit got up from where she sat and poked her head out from the brambles. I got up and slithered beside her, my pelt bristling in excitement. Leakit ears twitched, with an occasional flick of her tail to show a slightest irritation.

She moved her head keeping a lookout for cats that were around the camp. "Okay, it's clear now," she mewed. Without giving me a chance to respond, she quickly padded out of the bramble's and scrambled over to the nearest bramble—which happened to be right next to the apprentice den.

I flicked my tail and rushed after Leafkit. I hid under the brambles and peeked out.

"We're good," I hissed to Leafkit. The two of us were pressed together since the space we were in had little to none space, and pressing away from Leafkit meant getting my pelt stuck into thorns.

And then I would have to go to the medicine cat den, I thought, giving the thorns—that seemed to be reaching out to me—a rueful glance.

"Okay, this time," Leafkit mewed, tapping my shoulder with her tail, which quickly caught my attention. "We're gonna go straight into the medicine cat den."

I nodded. "Okay."

Leafkit once again checked for any cats outside. Once it was clear, she flicked her tail and bolted from the patch of bramble.

Great StarClan, she's fast, I thought as I ran after her. We soon were pressed against another set of bramble. However, this time I could see the small outline of the hole in the medicine cat den just as I saw it last time I went to grab moss.

"There!" I pointed my tail at the hole. Leafkit let out a sigh of relief beside me. "Okay good."

Before she could utter another word, I flicked her pelt and slithered over to the hole. Whiskers trembling, I pressed myself down to the

ground and crawled over to the hole. Once I was able to reach it, I gave it a cautious sniff making sure nothing was lurking there and that it actually had access to the other side of the den.

Growling, I reeled back and scrunched up my face in disgust. Leafkit, who was now beside gave me a worried glance. "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah," I meowed, wincing slightly. "It just smells really bad?" I shook my head hoping to brush the smell off.

Leafkit looked at me and purred her eyes glinting with amusement. "Well, duh, we're in the medicine cat den."

"Yeah, but that doesn't mean I have to like the smell," I replied, wrinkling my nose as an attempt to rid of the lasting sour smell. Wasting no more time, I poked my head into the hole once more. My gaze adjusted to the den—which wasn't that big, but not that small either.

At one side, rocks were jutted out that made perfect stock shelve for the herbs. Some of them clung to the wall and I could see herbs sitting among them. On the side, there was a small hole on the ground where water laid. There was a small crack in the ceiling where a small *tip, tip, tip,* indicated that water slithered from the cracks and dripped onto the small pool.

"Cool den," I murmured. I looked around once more and then saw Honeypaw. She was resting among a huge nest that must've been made specifically for her.

I twisted from my spot to get a better angle and saw that her pelt was smeared with green stuff—which I assumed were herbs. She was sleeping peacefully; her breathing which can be seen as her flank risen and fell.

A burst of relief shot through me as I then realized the she-cat was alive and breathing okay. Just then I could hear voices among the den.

". . . be alright, Leapflight. She needs to rest," a voice meowed. I

instantly recognized the voice as Parsleyseed.

"She lost a lot of blood to a point where I thought I wouldn't be able to save her. However, it turned out StarClan didn't want to take a cat in so young. We should be grateful. For now, she must rest."

I lowered my head and peered through the crack, curiosity burning through my pelt. I then felt a sharp jab by my side. Stifling a growl, I turned my head and saw Leafkit staring at me.

"What's going on?" she prompted. I pulled back from the hole and allowed Leafkit to wriggle through.

"See for yourself," I muttered. If we managed to stay still, both of us could look through the crack with no issues.

Now, Parsleyseed was sitting in front of the herb stocks with Leapflight sitting behind him. I saw Mouseclaw sitting a few mouse tail lengths away from Leapflight. From what I could see from here, Mouseclaw had his wounds cleaned up and I could see green poultices slick on his fur. Willownose sat beside him and I could see the relief in her eyes.

"Thank StarClan," I breathed. "He's okay."

Leafkit nodded beside me and we both fell into a hush once more.

"Parsleyseed," a voice suddenly boomed into the den causing everyone to look toward there. I inhaled sharply and held it as the cat walked into the den.

It's Finchstar, I thought in surprise as I watched padded into the den with Mallowtail behind her. "How is Honeypaw?" she asked. Her eyes held a glimmer of worry.

"She'll be fine for now if a fever doesn't break in," Parsleyseed mewed briskly. "I have to keep in check with her because a slightest infection can ravage a fever. I must be alert for any signs of them."

Finchstar nodded at the white and brown patched tom. She sat down and I saw her whiskers twitching.

"Mouseclaw?" She suddenly prompted and turned her attention to the brown tom.

"Yes?" Mouseclaw looked at Finchstar attentively.

"Where exactly were you attacked?" she asked, her eyes narrowed.

Mouseclaw twitched an ear and thought for a moment. "Around the Thunderclan border. There was a small ridge around there when we neared to the border."

Finchstar sat back against her haunches and flicked her tail. "I see," she responded.

"Is something on your mind, Finchstar?" Willownose asked anxiously.

"Yes," she murmured, her eyes were thoughtful and distracted. "How did the rouges get to our territory?"

Mallowtail narrowed his eyes and spoke his thoughts out loud. "ThunderClan would've been their next target, and since it was from ThunderClan that we heard of the rouges, I would've assumed that they would have warned us about the rouges."

Parsleyseed was chewing on marigold. He spat them onto a leaf and ordered Leapflight over to him. He then began applying the poultice onto her pelt.

"Don't tell me Ashstar is being selfish again," Parsleyseed growled as he scooped out another poultice onto his paw and carefully smeared it onto Leapflight's wound. "He has always been like that."

She let out a pain hiss and her claws dug onto the ground though she remained where she was.

Finchstar flicked her tail. "Perhaps," she replied. "But we don't know for sure. Maybe he was not aware, and we must keep in mind that not every Clan leader wishes to share any weakness to other Clans."

Mouseclaw let out a snort. "This isn't about weakness, this is about Ashstar and his unwillingness to lead his Clan properly."

"A coward indeed," Parsleyseed sneered. Finchstar shifted her paws, pressing her unsheathed claws into the soft ground

"Whatever the case may be, we *cannot* afford to let this happen again." Her gaze flicked over to Honeypaw for a while before she turned back to the group.

"From now on, any cat going outside the camp must be accompanied by another cat. The camp will be heavily guarded from now on," Finchstar mewed sharply. "We must be prepared this time. I doubt these cats are any regular rouges if they attacked WindClan and left them heavily injured. I will mention this in our next gathering."

"Very well," Mallowtail mewed. He got up from his spot and dipped his head. "I must organize hunting and border patrols."

With that, he vanished from the den. Finchstar gave Parsleyseed and Leaplfight a nod before she left the den as well, her ginger tail flicking behind her.

I sighed in relief and continued to watch as Parsleyseed went over to Honeypaw and sniffed the sleeping apprentice.

I felt a nudge at my side and looked at Leafkit. "Let's go, Petalshade will start looking for us soon," my sister spoke softly. I nodded and started maneuvering myself out of the hole when Leafkit grabbed me with unsheathed claws causing me to squeak a bit.

"What was that for?!" I hissed. She silenced me with a look and nodded back towards the hole we were just looking out of. I crawled back over to her and saw that Parsleyseed was now talking to Swiftpaw at the entrance of the Medicine cat den.

"How many times have I told you— there is no room in here!" The old medicine cat hissed at the apprentice. The old tom simply looks exhausted from the conversation alone.

"Please just let me see how Honeypaw is doing!" The apprentice pleaded.

Suddenly Cloudfur appeared next to his apprentice. "I'm sorry

Parsleyseed, I will escort Swiftpaw back to his den," Cloudfur said turning to give Swiftpaw with a meaningful glare. Parsleyseed hissed before storming back into his den.

I turned towards the exit of the tunnel and watched as Cloudfur ushered Swiftpaw up the rockslide path to the apprentice den. I flicked my tail to signal to Leafkit that we should go. My sister padded to my side and we waited for the cost to clear before we started heading up the rockslide path.

While we were waiting, I watched as Cloudfur walked past the medicine cat den towards the clearing to join one of the hunting patrols. We were lucky the patrols had all left, with one patrols including Finchstar.

Mallowtail was sitting on the meeting rock at the top of the rockslide with his ears perked watching the thorn barrier like at any moment a clan of rouge will spill into the camp. We waited a few for moments before Leafkit flicked her tail and we hurried up the path.

We were half way to the nursery when a voice came from behind us. "And where were you two?" Me and Leafkit both stopped dead in our tracks and turned to see Swiftpaw. The apprentice was glaring at us before he signaled us into the apprentice den. I looked back up to Mallowtail and saw he was still watching the thorn barrier.

Leafkit and J made our way into the apprentices den and when we entered, I saw Swiftpaw lying down in his nest with a empty nest right next to his.

That must be Honeypaw, I thought.

Swiftpaw flicked his ear before he spoke. "I'm not going to rat out you two," the apprentice began. "I just wanna know if Honeypaw is okay."

Suddenly the apprentices ears dropped and he swiftly looked up at us. "She is okay right? She's not dead is she?" Swiftpaw leaped out from his nest and came up to us. "She's fine right?" His tone was

shaking as he spoke.

"Honeypaw is fine . . ." Leafkit said, reassuring the apprentice. "She was just hurt, right Silentkit?" Leafkit asked, turning to me with eyes full of sympathy.

Parsleyseed words echoed in my mind. *"She lost a lot of blood to a point where I thought I wouldn't be able to save her. However, it turned out StarClan didn't want to take a cat in so young. We should be grateful. For now, she must rest."* I sent a thanks to star clan before replying.

"Yes, Honeypaw is fine she just needs rest," I told the apprentice.

Swiftpaw seemed calmer now that some cat told him Honeypaw is doing alright. He turned and stalked back over to his nest. Leafkit and I were about to leave then he spoke.

"And don't worry, I won't tell anyone what you two were doing," Swiftpaw said before closing his eyes and curling into his nest.

Leafkit gave me a nod before we both sprinted out of the apprentices den back to the nursery.

04 | lurking

[EDITED]

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1/ 4

L E A F

The soft blades of grass felt good on my rough paw pads, since Silentkit and I like to adventure all the time around the camp. Our paw pads are very rough and tough, yet they a long way to come to be like those of a warrior.

I was sniffing over a bush when I heard the sound of paws behind me. I whipped around and saw a vole munching on some—or what looked to be—herbs.

"Hey! All the herbs belong to Parsleyseed," I hissed getting into a hunters crouch just like Mouseclaw had shown me.

"Give back SkyClan's herbs!" I yowled before leaping from my hiding spot and almost *slamming the vole to the ground. The vole was already running by the time I regained my balance and gave chase.*

The vole was fast but I was faster. The dense trees of the forest engulfed me into a darker side of the forest, but no matter how dark it was I had to catch this herb stealer.

My claws were unsheathed and I was ready to make the final leap when I heard some cat calling my name and felt a warm paw on my shoulder blade. I stopped in my tracks and looked around as the voice grew louder and louder until . . .

"Leafkit, Leafkit, you squirrel-brain! Wake up!" My eyes shot open to see Silentkit prodding my shoulder with her paw.

"Silentkit! I was about to catch a vole," I hissed, frustrated. My body

rolled to the side, ruefully flexing my claws as I imagined sinking them into the vole from my dreams..

Ugh, it looked so good, I mourned.

Silentkit rolled her sky blue eyes and looked around the nursery as if to make sure we were alone.

I sniffed the morning milky scent of the Nursery. I simply couldn't wait to leave the Nursery and find ourselves useful around the camp. Being confined into a cave wasn't exactly endearing, and both of us, even including Blackkit and Ivykit were itching to get our paws on the clearing.

However, the leaf-bare's wind is harsh and cruel, and sometimes as we wait at the crook of the Nursery for Mouseclaw, I felt glad that it wasn't us yet that marched through the suffocating winds.

Seeing how it ruffled Swiftpaw's pelt made me scatter into my nest and snuggle warmly so not a peep of bitter wind could get me. It was not our time yet, and I was grateful that when it will be our time to become apprentices, the weather will be somewhat better.

I turned my attention back to Silentkit who was looking though the entrance of the nursery down to the clearing. I strode over to my sister side and followed her gaze. She was watching Swiftpaw leaping around the clearing bouncing with excitement as Honeypaw told him to calm down while she sat in front of the Medicine cat den.

It had been three days since the news of the attack had arrived to camp, and Honeypaw was back to her regular mood—but Parsleyseed had told her she would not be able to continue her training for another moon. The old medicine cat wanted to make sure Honeypaw was healed enough before taking any drastic measures

My ears twitched as I tried to understand what they were saying, but I couldn't hear them this far up the rockslide.

"I wonder what's going on," I questioned out loud. That's when I

idea came to my mind on how to mess with Silentkit. I looked towards my sister and saw she was now watching Finchstar walk down the rockslide path with Cloudfur. I poked my sister in her side with my tail and she turned her blue gaze to me and I sneered. "Looking at any toms Silentkit?" I asked teasingly.

I saw Silentkits face turn to shock and she shook her head with disgust in her eyes.

"I'd rather be mates with another she-cat then be mates with a tom." Silentkits mew was surprisingly stern and serious. I was about to say something back when Willownose poked her head into the nursery. "Do my ears hear me right? Our my little she-kits talking about toms?" Willownose purred and nuzzled both me and Silent.

"Well, aren't you two too young for such a topic?" Willownose prompted with a question in her eyes. "Don't worry yourselves with such nuisance. Whether you decide to take a family or not, I will always love you two equally, but I'd rather you focus on becoming good apprentices before all that."

"Of course," I mewed.

"We know." Silentkit rolled her eyes. "Can we go over to Swiftpaw and Honeypaw?"

"Yes, be careful, and do *not* give Honeypaw a hard time." There was a glint in her eyes when she spoke and we all knew—Mouseclaw including—better to listen to her words and never argue back.

Willownose stepped aside to allow us out of the den and to head down to the apprentices. As I had my way down the rockslide path, I noticed that a thorn branch that reached out from the thorn barrier and had grown in the way of the rockslide path.

I hope no cat steps on that, I thought continuing to walk towards Silentkit.

I purred as the late morning rays of sun sprayed onto my pelt and gave me a warm feeling, though there was still a slight chill in the air. That's when I remembered Willownose and Petalshade talking

about something called leaf-bare. Yes it's leaf-bare now, but the queens said at this time of Leaf-bare is when the weather is at its nicest one day but as cold as two-legs hearts on the other.

Finally I was now at Silentkits side and they all looked up and greeted me.

"Hey Leafkit, guess what?" Swiftpaw's tail was flashing from side to side like a happy dog while Silentkit turned to Leafkit.

"Swiftpaws finale assessment is today." Silentkit told me.

"Yep if she passes he'll become a warrior," Honeypaw added lastly.

I turned towards Swiftpaw. "Good luck!" I said before me and Silentkit went over to the fresh kill.

A hunting patrol had just gotten back so the prey was fresh. I was searching the pile for something juicy when I spotted a vole at the very top of the fresh kill pile, I narrowed my eyes against the bright sun before jumping up to the top of the pile—or well trying—when I landed the prey pile unbalance and I fell with all the prey.

Once I unburied myself, I turned and saw Silentkit with 2 voles in her jaws. I could tell she was hiding back laughter. "It's fine, I already have a vole," I said looking around the fresh kill for my vole when Silentkit spoke up.

"You mean that vole?" Silentkit asked pointing with her tail to where Blackkit and Ivykit were digging their greedy fangs into the vole. When they saw me staring, Blackkit yowled at me. "Thanks for the vole, we've been trying to get it for a few minutes now," Blackkit sneered before swallowing a fat piece of meat.

I snarled and turned back to Silentkit who signaled me over to the other side of the clearing away from Blackkit and Ivykit. I followed after her with my ears down, feeling my pelt burn with annoyance.

After a few moments of eating our voles, I was to busy eating the delicious morsel to notice a black cat standing over me and Silentkit. Silentkit nudged me with her tail and I noticed Embernose standing above us like we were prey and he was the hunter. Before

me or Silentkit could say anything Embernose spoke.

"Are you two kits too stupid to realize that trying to get the vole from the top of the fresh kill would lead to it falling down? Us hard working warriors don't appreciate our hard work getting trampled on," the black tom hissed, his blue eyes icy cold.

"I doubt my kits meant any harm," a new voice boomed, we all looked to our right and saw Mouseclaw padding over to us. He still looked wounded, but not as bad as before.

"Mouseclaw," Embernose spat my fathers name like venom. "Don't you teach your kits proper manners?" Embernose snarled.

"Don't you ever teach your kits not to tease their den mates?" Mouseclaw asked with a hint of a malice laced behind his words. He stood behind us and gave vicious stare at the tom.

Silentkit and Istared at the toms in shock. *Our mothers are such good friends but these two act like they are from different clans,* I thought. Another voice echoed across the clearing causing all the cats to stop what they were doing to look.

Finchstar was sitting in the center of the clearing with Cloudfur and Swiftpaw, the young apprentice could hardly stop fidgeting with excitement. Finchstar cleared her throat before speaking. "Today will be one of our apprentices, Swiftpaw's, final assessment. I ask you all to give him luck and your support!" Finchstar yowled so every cat could hear her in the clearing.

I watched as a few warriors went up to Swiftpaw and began wishing him. I saw him puff out his chest with pride, and could almost *taste* his embarrassment.

Honeypaw—who was sitting a few mouse-tail length away from the group—got up and padded over to him. I saw her say something to Swiftpaw which made him duck his head in embarrassment.

"Great StarClan, he'll burst before he even starts his assessment," I mutter in which Silentkit let out a small *mrrow* of laughter. She then gave me a nudge.

"But you should've seen the way he swelled when Honeypaw wished him luck," she mewed. Silentkit sat up and puffed out her chest, mimicking Swiftpaw. I let out an amused purr as I watched her. She then settled down and I began cleaning my muzzle.

From the corner of my eyes, I saw Swiftpaw walking down with his mentor by is side and Ravenwing padding a few mouse tail lengths behind. I noticed this and stopped cleaning my muzzle. "Why is Ravenwing going with them?" I asked, sitting up watching the three cats leave the camp.

"It's usual for an apprentice to be assessed other than their mentor," a voice cuts in and I quickly turn my head toward the voice.

Dawnsky, one of the young warriors, walked up to the fresh-kill pile, her eyes twinkling in amusement.

Curiosity spiked through me.

What did she mean by that? I wondered. The black and white tortoiseshell she-cat lifted a paw and gave it a lick. She then smoothed it down her muzzle.

"Why is that?" Silentkit meowed loudly. I nodded in agreement, wondering the same thing.

"The more eyes, the better," Dawnsky started. Her whiskers twitched for a moment before she spoke again. "And sometimes the apprentices are asked to work with another warrior as their assessment. Simply put, Cloudfur alone cannot determine if Swiftpaw can pass as mentor and apprentice relationship can tend to fond over the results, so a cat completely unrelated to the apprentice can assess more fairly."

"Wow that's cool," I admitted, flicking my tail. "And smart."

Dawnsky nodded her head and picked up a scrawny crow from the pile. She wrinkled her nose at it, but didn't say anything against it. "Yes, it is," she murmured softly. "Well, nevermind, I never had much of an appetite anyway."

Shrugging, she placed the crow back on the pile and began cleaning

her fur with clean, brisk strokes of her tongue.

Suddenly an image flashed through my mind; an older version of me walking through SkyClan territory leading a patrol or perhaps even better, having my own apprentice and teaching them the codes and skills to hone them into fine warriors.

The sudden thought spiked excitement into me and I already felt even more impatient of becoming an apprentice.

Dawnsky clearly saw our enthusiasm and let out a purr. "No worries, your apprenticeship will come soon, and I can already tell you'll be wonderful warriors."

Silentkit jumped up from where she was sitting, her eyes suddenly gleaming from Dawnsky's words.

"Really? You really think so?" she squealed.

Dawnsky nodded. "Of course, we've all been there." She paused and I saw her eyes narrowed. She suddenly unsheathe her claws and her pelt bristled slightly. A sudden thick tension had lifted around us as I watched Dawnsky's eyes grow dark. "Well at least *most* of us did," she growled though it seemed like she was talking to herself.

I shared a confused glance with Silentkit and I was sure we were thinking the same thing. I turned back to the tortoiseshell she-cat, ready to ask her about her statement when Stoneheart and Mallowtail padded over to her.

"You're in a hunting patrol with me," Mallowtail told Dawnsky. He could see that the she-cat was ruffled up and gave her a sympathetic glance. Dawnsky blinked for a moment and turned to Mallowtail with a nod.

"Alright," she mewed. She flicked her tail at us before leaving with the patrol, my eyes watching them as they disappeared over the cliff ridge.

"What was that about?" I meowed once the patrol left. I turned to Silentkit who was cleaning her pelt. She quickly snapped her head up at the sound of my voice.

"Huh?"

I sighed and rolled my eyes. "What did Dawnsky mean by 'at least most of us did'?" I questioned.

Silentkit stopped cleaning her pelt and became silent for a moment. "I'm not sure." She looked thoughtful for a moment before replying. "Maybe something from the past."

I nodded. "Probably."

I got up from my spot when Silentkit skidded in front of me, making me halt in my tracks. Her eyes were round with excitement and I could tell she was going to suggest something dumb.

"I just had an amazing idea!" she hissed to me.

I stifled a snort. *Not surprised.*

"And that is?"

Silentkit stopped pacing around and quickly faced me. "Okay, so I was thinking why not go watch Swiftpaw do his final assessment!"

At first, I thought she was joking. but upon her excitement that seemed to be flowing into her face and body, it occurred to me that she meant every word.

I stared at her as if she had grown a fox for a head. "*What?!"* I hissed at her. "Why in the name of StarClan would you want to do such a mouse-brained thing!"

"Because it's better than sitting here and doing nothing," Silentkit snapped. "And besides maybe we can learn a few things during the assessment."

I shook my head and growled at her, clearly annoyed. "And you expect no one to notice that we've been out of the camp?"

"Willownose is asked to be out on a patrol since we're short on warriors," Silentkit explained. "Mouseclaw is off in a border patrol and Petalshade won't even notice us!"

I glared at her. "Petalshade would notice us, fur-brain!"

Silentkit stayed quiet for a moment before she lifted her tail and stared at me with a challenging look in her eyes. At that moment I knew that she wasn't going to change her mind.

Stubborn furball, I thought.

"Well, I'm still doing it whether *you* want to or not! I don't care," she growled. "You're not going to change my mind anytime soon!"

Without another word, Silentkit turned away from me and began walking away.

I stared after her, a knot forming in my stomach. I knew that whatever Silentkit was doing was rash and mouse-brained, but even so I didn't want to leave her out into the wilderness because of my pride. Silentkit was my littermate—my sister. Even if she is annoying at some points, I love her for that. The thought of losing her sent a shudder down my spine.

Guess I have to go with her on this flea-brained mission, I thought. *I really hope no one catches us.*

Sighing, I got up and swiftly pelted after Silentkit who was walking toward the thicket of bramble and thorns that surrounds the camp.

"Silentkit!" I yowled. Silentkit halted in her tracks at the sound of my voice and turned to face me. I ran up to her and panted. "I'm coming with you," I tell her.

Silentkit frowned at me. "I thought you didn't want to," she mewed.

"I don't! But I'm not leaving you to do this dumb idea by yourself and get killed!" I snapped.

Silentkit looked surprised. Her eyes softened and she padded up to me, touching her nose to mine. "Thanks!"

I pulled away after a moment. "It's still dumb."

"Fine with me!" she purred. Silentkit then turned around and

ushered me to follow her. The two of us walked over to brambles only to be met with tight-closed walls.

"How do we get out of here?" I whispered over to Silentkit.

"Hmm, the brambles are probably our only way out of here," she mewed. I stared at her, baffled.

"You expect us to go through that?"

Silentkit shook her head. "I found a small hole where we can squeeze through a few days ago," she explained. "I tugged on the brambles for a bit and it made it a little bigger. Though we can't make it too big if we don't want anyone to notice us."

"I see," I meowed. Silentkit then dove through the hole. She struggled to get through and I can see a few leaves and thorn snagging her pelt. After a moment of struggling, Silentkit managed to squeezed through. I padded over to it and frowned.

"Can't someone smell us if they came over here?" I asked, peering into the hole.

"We'll have to cover it up somehow then," Silentkit squeaked from the other side. "Okay," I mewed before squeezing into the hole.

I grunt and push my hind legs, trying to get through the hole only to find myself struggling as I felt sharp thorns tug my pelt. I let out a frustrated hiss. I looked up and saw Silentkit staring at me with an amused look in her eyes.

"Stop standing there and help me!" I spat at her. Silentkit purred and walked up to me. She got on her hind legs and used her forearms to pull back a few brambles allowing me to squeeze through with a final push of legs. I crashed onto the ground with a huff.

"Phew!" I meowed as I sat up shaking the debris and leaves from my fur. Silentkit padded up to me and gave my shoulder a sniff; a tuft of fur missing on my shoulder. "I'm fine," I mewed quickly and nudged Silentkit away. She hesitated for a moment before letting out a nod.

That's when my senses crashed into me and I was thrown into a pool of awe. I thought that the camp was the biggest thing out there but clearly I was wrong. Outside was a thicket of whiteness. A soft blanket was left on the hearth, leaving everything still, completely composed and breathtakingly beautiful. A sharp, yet gentle breeze of wind sauntered into my fur making me shudder. Never have I ever seen anything beautiful than this.

"Wow," I whispered, taken completely into astonishment. I never felt so speechless. Silentkit walked over beside me and let out a nod of agreement. "I know right? It's beautiful," she meowed.

After a few heartbeats of us gazing at the wilderness, I got up and began sniffing around. Different smells wafted into my nose, surprising me. It dawned upon me on how there were countless of scents within the woods, far more than in the camp.

"Okay, you lead," I told her as I gave the snow a curious sniff. Apparently, I sniffed too hard and accidentally crashed into the soft snow. I yelped and shook my head, dropping the snow lingering on my nose. "You do have a sharp nose."

Silentkit flicked her folded ears before they folded back onto her head, she lifted her head into the air and sniffed. She brought it down and gazed into the trees. "That way," she mewed, her voice stern and serious. I nodded. "Lead the way."

Silentkit sprinted through the linings and linings of trees and I bursted right after her. We skirted through bushes and maneuvered from ivy and brambles. My paws hit the snow, sending white flecks flying through the air as I ran after Silentkit. We ran for what seemed like a moon. I had to keep Silentkit right in front of my range, fearing that she might disappear into the white linings of bumpy curves.

She then suddenly skidded to a stop causing me to skid into a halt. The momentum of running so fast and stopping so suddenly caused me to fly over and crash into the ground once again. Only this time, I was met with brown dirt. Scowling, I sat up and spat the dirt from my tongue. I shook my wet, dirty pelt and frowned at Silentkit whom was staring into the trees.

"What is it?" I asked as I padded over to her. My whiskers twitched anxiously as I look at Silentkit and back at the midst of trees. Lifting my head, I tasted the air hoping to catch something but I caught a huge reek of something—StarClan knows what—around the area.

Silentkit paused before turning to me, her eyes round with curiosity and a hint of worry.

"What is that smell?" I questioned.

Silentkit hesitated before answering. "I'm not sure, but I kept smelling it when we were running so I stopped but now the reek is only getting stronger."

If the scent is stronger, doesn't that mean—whatever the thing is—is close by? I wondered, my pelt itching as I suddenly became aware of how dangerous our situation has gotten.

I was about to answer Silentkit when a sudden growl made me freeze in my tracks. I stiffened and the hair on my pelt rose; Silentkit beside me pressed against me, stiff with shock.

"What was that?" I whispered to Silentkit.

"I-I'm not sure," she mewed, her voice suddenly thick with fear. It then occurred to me that we were truly alone.

Alone in the white, bright yet dark forest. Filled with nothing but trees and trees. No one would be able to hear us yowl or cry for help. We truly are alone.

All alone to face the danger.

Just then another growl broke the deafening silence, and the two of us bundled together, our hearts beating wildly. Every hair on my pelt was out, my ears flattened and claws unsheathed though it would be pointless anyways.

The only thing that could be heard was the silent beating of our chest; the light *of thump, thump, thump,* to where I thought it would fly out of chest leaving me breathless.

Then it unleashed.

A red furry creature exploded out of the ferns and was towering on top of us within a heartbeat.

My heart dropped to my stomach as a yowl broke out.

"Fox!" I screeched.

05 | trouble

[EDITED]

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1/ 4

S I L E N T

A red furry creature exploded out of the ferns and was towering on top of us within a heartbeat.

My heart dropped to my stomach as a yowl broke out.

"Fox!" I screeched.

Leafkit's terrified yowl pierced my ears and a fresh stench of fox engulfed the clearing. The savage fox was snarling and drool dripped from its mouth. The fox started stepping closer and I yowled. "*Run!*"

I turned tail and ran straight into the dense forest, I turned my head behind and saw Leafkit running a few fox lengths behind me.

The dense forest of Skyclan territory was vast and the tall trees covered the sky. *How are we going to escape the fox?!?* I tried thinking of a plan, but then I would hear the snarling and barking of the fox and all StarClan told me to do was run.

The sound of paws thudding behind us grew louder and louder; my heart was thudding so loud in my chest that I could almost hear it. The sound of panting caught my attention and I realized how tired I was. *Me and Leafkit have never had to run this fast for this long! When will this nightmare be over!?!*

"Silentkit! The fox is gaining on us!" Leafkit screamed behind me, I turned my head to look at Leafkit when something sharp snagged on my leg and I fell with a thud. I whimpered in pain and lifted my

head up and saw my hind leg had somehow gotten wrapped up in a thorn vine.

"Leafkit help!" I wailed to Leafkit who was now ahead. Leafkit stopped and spun around, her head whipping towards my direction. Her eyes suddenly widened in horror and leapt forward with a screech tearing through the air.

"Silentkit look out!" she cried, her voice cracking in terror and desperation, speeding over to where I was, but she was too far away, and the fox had gained energy after seeing my fallen figure. The fox jaws opened and drool came out. I scrunched my body and slammed my eyes shut, waiting to feel the pain of the fox's thorn sharp teeth in my neck when another yowl broke the air.

The fox came to a stop and whipped its head around, looking for the cat who yowled. Just then a blur of black and white fur exploded from the thorn bushes and the cat slammed their body against the fox. The two went crashing through the bushes, fighting with all teeth and claws.

"Silentkit!" Leafkit ran over to me. "Are you okay? Are you hurt?" Leafkit helped me stand and we both turned back towards the cat and fox fighting. Just when I got a good look at the cats pelt and it hit me.

"Swiftpaw!" I gasped at the apprentice.

Swiftpaw turned towards me and Leafkit, blood dripping from his nicked ear tip. "Run!" he screeched, shoving the hungry fox off of him and striking at its muzzle.

Leafkit and I stood stiff as stones staring at the fight. The fox was now pinned to the ground with Swiftpaw above it, the fox kicked out its back legs causing Swiftpaw to stumble while the fox gripped Swiftpaw scruff and shook him like prey.

Swiftpaw turned his body and sank in thorn sharp claws into the fox's shoulder. The fox yowled in pain and dropped Swiftpaw, at that second Swiftpaw ducked under the fox's belly and tore though the soft skin. The fox shrieked and cried in pain.

But this fox was stubborn and grabbed Swiftpaw tail, sinking its sharp teeth into the fur of Swiftpaw tail before throwing the apprentice like prey towards the clearing me and Leafkit stood in. Swiftpaw jumped up and raised his paw ready to strike at the fox's nuzzle when another yowl of a grow cat broke the though the snarls and hisses of the fox and Swiftpaw.

Cloudfur and Ravenwing bursts into the clearing, both of the toms ran towards the fox ready for a fight when the fox turned tail and ran towards ShadowClan territory.

Swiftpaw's head fell in exhaustion and pain. Cloudfur went over to his apprentice while Ravenwing turned his amber gaze to me and Leafkit. "What in StarClan are you two doing out here?!?" The black tom snarled.

Cloudfur turned towards Ravenwing. "Ravenwing, I understand you're upset, but now is not the time for that," the white tabby hissed. "Swiftpaw needs to get back camp to see Parsleyseed." Then the tom turned toward me and Leafkit. "And there two need to get back to their mother."

With Leafkit helping me walk ,we made our way back to camp. Swiftpaw was being supported by Cloudfur's shoulder, me and Leafkit were in the middle, and Ravenwing was walking at the rear.

The pain in my leg was sharp; I had to walk on three paws the whole time. Nightfall was soon and I could hear Cloudfur worried whispers to his apprentice.

"You were very brave saving those foolish kits alone, but these wounds will take more then three moons to heal."

As we all walked and limped though the thorn barrier I could hear worried yowl from the nursery. "Silentkit! Leafkit! I smell them!" *Willownose,* I thought. Then the thought of crawling into a warm nest with Leafkit and willownose gave me energy to continue walking.

Finchstar and Willownose were the first at the end of the camp entrance tunnel, Willownose ran straight to me and Leafkit. She

nuzzled us both and curled her body around us protectively. "Oh, my daughters, thank StarClan you two are safe!" Then Willownose saw my injured leg and gasped in fright. "No, my poor kit!" She lapped the top of my head anxiously. "It's okay, Parsleyseed will help you."

The SkyClan medicine cat ran out of his den with herbs in his jaws followed by . . . Ivykit? Parsleyseed started applying a ointment to Swiftpaw's wounds while Willownose helped me pull the thorn from my leg. "Get Swiftpaw, Silentkit, and Leafkit into my den now!" The old medicine cat hissed to Cloudfur and Ravenwing. Stoneheart came over to us to help the medicine cat with whatever he needed.

With Swiftpaw in a nest—now sleeping from the poppy seeds—that Parsleyseed gave the apprentice, the old tom was now sitting at the bed of my nest putting ointment on my wounds from the thorns. I believe it was marigold from what Parsleyseed was saying to Ivykit. At the thought, my attention now drew to the small she-kit that was working at the back of the den. She had a clump of moss in her jaw and dipped the wad into a small pool before skipping over to where I lay.

"Here you go," she mewed cheerfully.

"Thank you," I murmured and leaned forward to lap the moss.

"Thank you, Ivykit, you should head back to Petalshade now. You don't want to worry now, do you?" Parsleyseed said to Ivkit who nodded her head and wished me and Leafkit farewell, then turning tail and strutted out of the den.

Leafkit was next to me licking from mud from my fur when Mouseclaw and Finchstar came into the medicine cat den.

Parsleyseed looked up at his leader, and Finchstar gave the med cat a nod with that Parsleyseed continued treating my wounds while Mouseclaw started speaking. "How mouse brained can you two be?" the dark brown tom snarled. "Leaving camp when your not of age to leave camp! How mouse brained of both of you."

Finchstar gave Mouseclaw a look and the tom sighed before taking

a step back before letting his leader speak.

"Silentkit, Leafkit, I'm glad to see you two are back safel,y but if it wasn't for Swiftpaw you two would be fox food!" The ginger she-cat snapped. "Since Skyclan's only apprentices are both injured, you two will take the responsibility of taking care of the elders ticks, clearing and replacing moss, and do any apprentice task that involves staying in the camp," Finchstar meowed sharply.

"You will do this for a moon and by the time that moon is up you two will be of age to become apprentices." Finchstar looked towards Mouseclaw. "Mouseclaw and Willownose agree with your punishment, I hope the wounds you received and the work that is ahead of you will teach you two how to behave." With that Finchstar left with a flick of her tail.

* * *

Dawn light flooded the medicine cat den causing the cats inside to stir. Parsleyseed woke with a huge yawn and made his way out of his den to wash his pelt under the morning rays.

Just as Parsleyseed stepped out a flash of silver and black ran down the rockslide path and stopped in front of Parsleyseed. "Good morning, Ivykit." Parsleyseed mewed to the black and silver tabby kit standing in front of him, eyes shining with excitement.

"Morning Parsleyseed!" The young kit squeaked. "Have you decided yet?" Ivykit asked her tail high.

Parsleyseed touched his graying muzzle to the top of Ivykit head and spoke. "I would be delighted to have you as my apprentice when you become the age of six moons." The old tom rasped with an affectionate lick on Ivykit ear.

The young cat squealed with joy, staring at the older tom. "Oh thank you, Parsleyseed! Thank you!" Ivykit said, running into Parsleyseeds forearm and rubbing against him purring madly.

The sound of Ivykit's purring woke me from a dream of running with a cat in the forest—I didn't recognize the cat, but I felt a strong

bond with them, whoever they were.

I sat up straight and looked down at my injured leg. The thorns had cut deep and Parsleyseed said that I needed to stay off of it for a couple of days to let it heal. *This is going to be the most boring day ever!* I thought dropping dramatically back on my nest.

Just then I remembered that me and Leafkit were punished from leaving camp and I groaned with frustration. *"Being given apprentice tasks before you become a apprentice will sharpen your skills, and you will get to train more if you work harder and faster."* Willownose had told me before she took Leafkit back to the nursery despite of her mews of protest.

I was laid down in my nest looking at my sharp claws when I heard paw steps outside the medicine cat den, and Parsleyseed and Ivykit walked in. I ducked in the nest pretending to sleep so I could listen to their conversation.

"Tell me Ivykit, what do we use to help stop bleeding?" Parsleyseeds asked. here was a few heart beats of silence before Ivykit spoke up. "Cobwebs!" Ivykit mewed.

Just then I remembered Ivykit running after Parsleyseed when the medicine cat came to check me and Swiftpaw's wounds yesterday. *Who would want to learn yucky herbs when you could be out hunting and fighting other cats, protecting your clan from the ones who seek to harm us?* I thought, perking my ears listening for Swiftpaw's soft breathing in the nest right of mine.

I was about to announce myself when I heard a yowl from the camp clearing.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey join here beneath the rockslide for a clan meeting!" Finchstars yowl echoed though the camp and my ears perked at the sound of Swiftpaw stirring. He grunted slightly and slowly got up from his nest with great effort. He then gently walked towards the entrance of the den.

I hopped out of my nest and waved a greeting to Parsleyseed and Ivykit before running over to Leafkit and Mouseclaw. Willownose

came to sit next to us in the center of the clearing. I watched out of the corner of my eye as Parsleyseed, Ivykit, Honeypaw, and Swiftpaw stood at the entrance of the medicine cat den.

Foxwhisker, Flakenose, and Flowerheart sat at the entrance of the elders den while Petalshade, Blackit, and Embernose sat close by. Cloudfur and Ravenwing sat at the beginning of the rockslide path while Dawnsky and Snowpebble sat by the thorn barrier talking in hushed voices.

Just behind me I could see Stoneheart and Leapflight sitting close together with their tails intertwined. *Are they mates?* I wondered. *They seemed to be spending a lot of time together.*

Once everyone gathered around, Finchstar began to speak. "Swiftpaw!" The leader yowled, Swiftpaw stood, looking shocked at the sudden call of his name. "Today is the day this young apprentice will receive his warrior name!"

Yowls of excitement filled the clearing for a few heart beats before Finchstar silenced the cats with a flick of her tail and signaled Swiftpaw forward.

Swiftpaw walked up slowly, but stopped suddenly. "But Finchstar, I didn't complete my warriors assessment!" The apprentice told her leader doubt clouding his eyes.

Finchstar look down at the apprentice before speaking. "You may have not have completed your warriors assessment, but you did show great loyalty by saving Leafkit and Silentkit from that fox." Finchstar said turning to me and Leafkit.

I licked my chest to avoid the stares of my clan mates. Finchstar turning back to Swiftpaw and spoke, her voice full of pride. "You showed true loyalty and bravery saving those naughty kits, that is enough to be able to serve your clan until the day you join StarClan."

From the corner of my eyes, I saw Embernose and Petalshade, Swiftpaw's parents, sitting a few fox tail length beside me. Their eyes were shimmering with pride as they watched the scene unfold.

With that Finchstar leaped down the rockslide path and now stood in front of Swiftpaw looking proud down at the apprentice. "I, Finchstar, leader of SkyClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as a warrior in their turn."

"Swiftpaw, do you promise to hold the warrior code and to protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Swiftpaw looked up proudly at Finchstar and spoke confidently. "I do, Finchstar."

Finchstar purred warmly before continuing. "Then by the power of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Swiftpaw from this moment on you will be known as Swiftleap. StarClan honors your bravery, and we welcome you as a full warrior of SkyClan."

Finchstar rested her muzzle on top of Swiftleap's head and in return the new warrior licked his leaders shoulder. As Swiftleap stepped away from his leader the clan started calling out the new warrior name.

"Swiftleap!"

"Swiftleap!"

"Swiftleap!"

Petalshade quickly got up and walked over to Swiftleap, touching his ear with her nose. Embernose padded up to them and gave Swiftleap a nod though his eyes were gleaming with pride.

I yowled the new warriors name as loud as I could. After the yowls started dying away, I remembered that soon me and Leafkit will be apprentices soon and the excitement pulsed though my body like lightning—even though we had to do apprentices jobs earlier.

06 | apprentices

[EDITED]

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2/ 4

L E A F

A moon later...

Tired and grogginess lapsed into my body as I opened my eyes, seeing the familiar nursery den. I sighed and buried my head back into the warmth of my nest, tiredness flooding through me.

Apparently, me and Silentkit had to drag moss all day yesterday because Flakenose was super cranky at that time. Her joints were stiff and she complained about the prickly moss being uncomfortable. And then, not to mention, I then had to search for ticks.

I wrinkled my nose and I remembered the pungent smell of the bile. I didn't understand how medicine cats can have those stored without having them casting such a terrible smell.

I curled up and was about to fall asleep when I heard a yowl in the nursery causing my head to snap up, wide and alert. Silentkit was running over to me, her eyes wide with anticipation. My eyes then drooped at the sight of Silentkit and turned away from her.

She better not have some stupid idea cause the last time it happened it definitely didn't end well.

"Leafkit! Leafkit!"

I whined softly and flattened my ears against my head, not wanting to hear whatever she has to say. I suddenly wondered how she could be so energetic and jumpy when Parsleyseed clearly said not

to jump around with her paw healing.

Silentkit's paw and gotten better ever since she sprained it. For the first few days after our confinement in the camp, Silentkit wasn't allowed to haul any mosses to the elder and had to sit in the corner, her paw wrapped in comfrey leaves, watching in me in mock as I stomped my way over to the grumpy elders.

Flakenose, for one, would not stop complaining about the moss. Either it's too prickly or too cold. It's too small or has burrs.

And it's not fair, I thought gloomily. *I couldn't leave the camp to get some.*

Not like I even could under my circumstance. For StarClan's sake, I'm still a kit! I didn't even ask to get in trouble, it was brought upon me, yet the cheeky one that had gotten me tangled into this mess hasn't pulled the same weight as me for the punishment!

Silentkit was still prodding my side and I gave up ignoring her. Lifting up my head, I glared at her. "What is it?"

Silentkit ignored my crankiness and gave an excited jump. Her fur was fluffed out and her tail was swishing on the ground from side to side, in complete excitement. "I heard Willownose and Mouseclaw talking outside the nursery," she started and I pricked up my ear in interest. "I heard them saying that our apprentice ceremony might be held today!"

I blink a few times at her before a wave of surprise and excitement crashed onto me. I sat up in my nest, unable to keep the joy out of my eyes. My tiredness was gone and excitement seems to pulse through me.

No way . . . we're gonna be apprentice?

"Really?" I ask, my pelt spiking out. Silentkit nodded at me her eyes glimmering.

"Yes! We did reach to six moons and we worked hard for it," she told me which earned a snort from me. Clearly Silentkit had thistles stuffed into her brain because I never re-called her working hard. I

mean she had to sit out for most of the times anyways.

"Yeah while getting our rumps kicked in the dirt by foxes and tick duty," I grumbled, exasperated.

Silentkit purred. "Oh come on, it wasn't that bad now was it?"

I gave her a glare, ruffled by her words. "Excuse me? Aren't you the one who came up with the mouse-brained idea, and you didn't do half much of the work I did, so yes, it was bad!"

"Oops! Well . . . you have a point . . ." Silentkit trailed off before she flicked her tail at me good-humorly. I let out a hiss of annoyance. I nudged her away and walked back to my nest before sitting on it. Silentkit then mewed. "But it doesn't matter now, we're gonna be apprentices."

I huffed and decided not to make a huge deal out of nothing. What happened is what happened. Sighing, I began cleaning my pelt with long, rhythmic strokes. Silentkit sat beside me and continued talking.

"Who do you think our mentors are going to be?" she asked, ripping a small bit of moss from my nest. She slapped it to the ground and slowly molded it into a small ball.

I stopped cleaning my pelt and thought for a moment. "Not Leapflight and Cloudfur, for sure," I confirmed in which Silentkit agreed upon. "Yeah Cloudfur already mentored Swiftleap and Honeypaw is having her assessment in a few days."

I nodded and continued cleaning my pelt. "Ravenwing?" I prompted. Silentkit shook her head at my response.

"No way," she hissed and slapped the moss on ground. "He's super bad-tempered! Remember when he yelled at us outside the camp?"

I looked up from my pelt and tried not to roll my eyes at Silentkit. "We were outside the camp, you thistled-down idiot! Of course he would be angry. We were old enough to be reasonable with our decisions and the warrior code," I told her and flicked my ear. "And Swiftleap got injured because of us."

However, Silentkit only let out a huff and rolled the small piece of moss under her paws.

"Still he seemed like angry, angry. Didn't need to be so rude."

I shrugged, not really wanting to argue with her. "Stoneheart?" I suggested.

Silentkit tipped her head to the side and thought for a moment. "He's a senior warrior; a level headed and a calm cat. He'll be a reasonable mentor."

I nodded in agreement. "And then there is Snowpebble."

"He's okay, I guess," Silentkit mewed. She gave her chest a couple of licks before continuing. "But he seems too boring."

I snorted. "Mentors aren't suppose to be boring."

"They can be," she insisted. "I mean, if they're not like super enthusiastic or just boring and stick to the warrior code all the time."

"Yeah well, don't let anyone catch you on who's boring or not," I meowed. Silentkit then looked at me and I saw her eyes gleaming with amusement. "Like you?"

I gave her a light shove. "Fur brain!" I purred. Just then Willownose appeared into the nursery. Her brown fur was neatly groomed and her eyes shone in pride when she gazed down at us. Silentkit leaped up beside me and fluffed out her fur.

"Is the ceremony happening? Is it? Is it?" Silentkit was practically bouncing but I couldn't say I wasn't either. I was staring at Willownose while my clws were unsheathed, digging deep into the moss.

"Yes," she purred. She leaned forward and gave both of our ears a loving lick. "I'm so proud of you two."

I cringed slightly at her words and ducked from her licks. I then tilted my head and looked at her. "Even when we left the camp?"

Willownose let out a snort of laughter. "Why—of course not fur-brain!" She gave me a playful nudge and the tips of my ear burned from embarrassment. Silentkit beside me purred and shifted her paws awkwardly. Willownose then continued talking and both me and Silenkit became silent as she did.

"You two were silly when doing that, but I understand why you did it. I'm just glad you're okay and that's all what matters," she said. "Learn from your mistakes. And no, not for you to not do it again, but to understand why you did it and if you were wrong in doing so. Your journeys are hard ahead, I can see that and believe me we all have been there. Mistakes were recalled and judgments were made, but in the end, make sure to have faith in yourself. No matter what you do and what happens, you two will always be my daughters and I love you very much. Whatever choices you make, I will support both of you."

My heart swelled at Willownose's words and I never felt more grateful for someone's support. Willownose always lectured us and fussed over us, but her words now made me realized how loving and understanding she is. No matter what, she'll still love us.

I swallowed thickly and pressed myself against Willownose's fur.

I've never been gladder to have her as my mom, I thought as I soaked in the warmth of Willownose. Silentkit pressed herself against Willownose on her other side.

"Thank you," Silentkit whispered, her voice wavering as she spoke.

Willownose bent down and gave both of our ears a lick. "Of course, my dears."

Just then, Mouseclaw poked his head into the nursery and his gaze made way to our bundled fur pressed against Willownose. I lifted my head and watched as he padded in. Silentkit ripped herself away from Willownose and let out an excited gasp. My eyes widened as I realization dawned upon me.

"How are my kits doing?" he asked, his eyes shining in contentment

"Excited!" Silentkit let out another bounce and I wondered how many times she already had bounced today.

"Is it time to go?" I asked, my stomach suddenly quenched and the nervousness seemed to lapped into me making me jittery. Mouseclaw saw my anxiousness and touched my shoulder with his tail.

"Calm down," he assured. "All you have to do is stand and then you're apprentices. Besides, me and Willownose will sit on the side, so if you need any encouragement just look at us and I assure you, I shall confide you confidence by plucking feathers into my fur."

I let out a small *mrrow* of laughter while Willownose purred. "They'll be fine."

"In that case, let's get going. The ceremony is soon."

I nodded and the four of us walked out of the den. Silentkit padded by my side, our pelts brushing. I could feel her fur fluffing out from excitement while mine was from nervousness.

Silentkit leaned her head closer to mine. "You're going to be alright," she whispered. "I'm right beside you!"

"Thank you," I murmured and touched my nose to her ear before the two of us brushed past the entrance. Outside, everyone seemed to know what was going on.

Leapflight and Stoneheart were sitting together with their heads bent in close. They looked at us as we walked out of the den and sat nearby. Swiftleap and Honeypaw were lounging outside the apprentice den and were sharing tongues. Parsleyseed was walking over to a small patch of grass and laid his herbs there while Ivykit sat behind him, watching as he worked. Cloudfur was sitting outside the warrior den and was cleaning his pelt. Embernose and Petalshade were sharing a shrew near the center of the camp, while Blackkit was talking with Foxwhisker and Flowerheart outside the elders den. Finchstar sat out outside her den, her gaze watched commandingly as it swept over the camp.

Her gaze then landed on us and I saw a glint of anticipation as she looked at us. Then a sudden yowl rang out in the camp alerting everyone there.

"Let all cats' old enough to catch their own prey join beneath the meeting rock for a Clan meeting!"

Silentkit wriggled beside me while Willownose and Mouseclaw made sure we looked clean and that our fur were neat and glossy. Silentkit ducked from their licks and nudged me. "Let's go! It's time."

I nodded and watched as cats began to pile around the meeting rock. The two of us padded to the center and all eyes fell on us. I lifted my chin and watched as Finchstar bounded over to the edge of the rock and gazed down at us.

"Cats of SkyClan," Finchstar began. "Leaf-bare is at it's harshest and rouges are threatening our borders. Right now, we need more warriors than ever to strengthen our clan. While Silentkit and Leafkit has left the camp against the rules, I believe that they are now ready to become apprentices. They have reached six moons and proved themselves to be valuable clanmates while carrying out their duties as said."

Small murmurs of agreement rose around the camp and I felt myself swell with pride. Finchstar then beckoned Silentkit who stood beside me. "Come forward," she commanded.

Silentkit inhaled sharply and I whispered a "good luck" as she walked closer to the meeting rock. The small flick of her folded ears told me that she heard my comment.

"Silentkit from this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Silentpaw," Finchstar meowed. Her gaze swept over the clan before it landed on Mallowtail.

"Mallowtail, you are the deputy of the clan. You have shown great thoughtfulness and strength, and I trust you to share your knowledge and skills to Silentpaw."

Mallowtail padded from where he sat near the meeting rock. His

eyes shone with pride as he bent down to touch noses with Silentpaw. The two then walked over to the edge of the crowd and sat down. Silentpaw gazed at me encouragingly and I watched as Finchstar beckoned me forward.

"Leafkit from this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Leafpaw."

Finchstar then swept her tail to the crowd. "Dawnsky, you are a young but an exceptional warrior. You have shown courage and great loyalty for you clan. I trust you to pass your skill to Leafpaw."

Dawnsky dipped her head and padded over to me. She bent down and touched my nose. "Can't wait to learn!" I whispered to her.

Dawnsky purred, her eyes warm with welcome. "Me too."

Then the camp erupted into yowls, shouting our names into the frosty, misty air. "Silentpaw! Leafpaw! Silentpaw! Leafpaw!"

I straightened besides Dawnsky and felt pride sinking in as everyone yowled out our names. Just as the cries settled down, Silentpaw padded over to me with Mallowtail a few mouse-tail length behind her.

"We're apprentices now!" she meowed excitedly. I nodded, feeling her enthusiasm. I then saw Willownose and Mouseclaw, their pelts brushing as they padded over to us. "Great job!" Mouseclaw told me and purred.

"I didn't see any feathers on you," I mused.

"Of course not," Mouseclaw meowed. He then jerked his head toward our mentors. "Seems like they are waiting for you. Best if you go now."

I nodded as Willownose gave both of us a quick lick before we hurried over to Dawnsky and Mallowtail. The two were talking to each other in hushed voices. As we halted in front of them, Dawnsky lifted her hed.

"What are we going to do now?" I ask.

"Well, first we're going to tour the territory," Dawnsky mewed. "You'll get to see the other Clan's border and what our territory is like."

"And the Silverpelt!" Silentpaw hissed.

"And the Silverpelt," Mallowtail mused and flicked his ear. "Well then, let's get going."

Mallowtail turned around and began walking toward the camp entrance. We squeezed through the brambles and began walking through the dense trees.

And then our journey starts here.

07 | journey

[EDITED]

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2/ 4

S I L E N T

There was no cat happier in the forest right now. Me and Leafpaw were finally made apprentices and this was our first time outside. Well, not exactly first time, but first time out when we are allowed!

As me, Leafpaw, and our mentors made our way through the thorn barrier, energy flashed over my body and I felt like the thorn barrier was keeping me locked in a small nest. The energy became overwhelming and I dashed past Mallowtail and Dawnsky.

I bursted though the thorn tunnel and stared in amazement and mews of laughter came from behind me. "You're acting like this is your first time out of camp," Mallowtail mewed as he emerged from the thorn tunnel, Dawnsky and Leafpaw just behind him.

"I'm just excited," I said shyly. Mallowtail gave my folded ear a soft flick with his bushy tail.

"That's normal, and soon you and Leafpaw will learn much more than simply sneaking out from the camp when knowing not too." Mallowtail gave us both a meaningful look before turning to Dawnsky.

Leafpaw came to my side, I could see her paws fidgeting with excitement. "What should we show the apprentices first?" Mallowtail asked turning to Dawnsky.

"Hmm." The black and white tortoiseshell thought for a moment before continuing. "We should take them along the ThunderClan border first, then past the Gathering Hill, and lastly ShadowClan's

border. Though, traveling through this blanket of snow will take quite a while." Dawnsky gave us both amused glances. "Their legs are still quite small."

"You're right, but we have all day so we'll take our time," Mallowtail said and kinked back his tail, signaling for us to follow him. With Mallowtail in the front, me and Leafpaw in the middle, and Dawnsky at the rear, we started heading towards the ThunderClan border.

The sun light rays were bright and blinding as I walked though the dense forest of the Skyclan territory. Before when Leafpaw and I snucked out before we were of age I didnt get to notice all the beauties of the forest.

The icyness of the snow made my paw pads feel aching and sore. The crisp morning air made me shudder and shrink within the comfort of my pelt, but even so I could not escape the cold.

"It's so cold," I complained and shook out my paws to rid of the clumps of snow clinging onto my fur.

"Very," Leafpaw grumbled beside me.

"Welcome to leaf-bare," Dawnsky mewed sarcastically. She then stopped walking and gave us an anxious look. "Are you two alright?"

"I am," Leafpaw meowed and sniffed stiffly. "It just sort of hurts."

"Yeah." I licked my pad and set it back down on the ground.

"You'll get used to it, don't worry," Mallowtail told us. "SkyClan's pads are the most toughest anyway. Since you were kits, your pads are not as tough as warriors, but we'll build on those eventually, and before you know it, the most simplest things won't hurt you."

I nodded my head. "Okay."

"Let's continue toward ThunderClan."

We continued walking for a while in the stilled silence of the forest

when suddenly the scent of vole overcame my nose. I turned towards the scent stopping in my tracks. Leafpaw passed by me and Dawnsky stopped at my side.

"What's wrong?" The tortoiseshell asked me.

"I smell a vole," I said, turning towards a bush. Dawnsky lowered herself to my height and spoke softly.

"Follow it, we don't get those often," The she-cat encouraged nudging me towards where my nose was following.

By now Mallowtail and Leafpaw realized that me and Dawnsky stopped following and turned towards us. "Something wrong, Dawnsky?" Mallowtail asked watching me curiously. Dawnsky turned to the deputy and gave him a look, causing him to close his muzzle.

"We don't know how to hunt yet though," Leafpaw murmured to her mentor.

"That's alright," Mallowtail said in a hushed tone. "I want to see how Silentpaw does it and see what we have to work on."

I could feel the eyes of the three—now silently watching me—as I crawled towards the bush. The scent of the vole became strong as I got closer and closer to the bush.

I crawled though the bush and the scent suddenly became flooded with blood. My fur stood on end and I pushed past the bush into a small clearing. There in the middle of the clearing sat a dead vole, it's body was chewed up and squashed into bits.

I stalked over to the prey and sniffed at its body. The scent was revolting. I had only scented this smell once when there was a bad piece of fresh kill in the pile. I turned back towards the bush I came from and called to the other cats. "Mallowtail! Dawnsky! Come look at this!" I called

Mallowtail pushed his way though the bush shortly followed by Dawnsky and Leafpaw. The pale ginger tom rested his bushy tail on my flank and stared at the beaten up vole. "Crow food," Mallowtail

mumbled.

"Perhaps its from a fox or another cat?" I suggested, but Mallowtail shook his head firmly.

"No, this is a cat scent, but not one of a clan cat." Mallowtail said beckoning Dawnsky over with a flick of his tail.

The two warrior exchanged a few words before Mallowtail headed in the other direction of where we were heading. I was abut to follow my mentor when Dawnsky stopped me.

"Mallowtail must report this to Finchstar, he will catch up with us later, but for now let's continue," the she-cat said firmly.

Dawnsky stalked out of the clearing back in the direction we were going with confident strides while me and Leafpaw followed behind.

After a few minutes and awkward silence and soft muttering from Dawnsky, I noticed that the forest ahead of us started to get dense. I could barley see any blades of grass because they were covered by snow.

Just as we got to the beginning of the upcoming dense forest, Dawnsky stopped abruptly and turned to me and Leafpaw. "Tell me," the tortoiseshell encouraged. "What do you two smell?"

Leafpaw and J both opened our jaws slightly to take in the new scents of the forest when a familiar scent washed over me. "I smell, Mallowtail!" I said whipping around just as the deputy pushed past the trees to join us again.

"Well scented Silentpaw," Mallowtail praised me and I allowed my tail to rise at my mentors praise.

"What do you smell Leafpaw?" Dawnsky asked turning to my sister and saw her nose was scrunched up and her eyes were shut tight. "Something that smells stronger than mouse bile!" she hissed. "But I also smell SkyClan's scent within this side."

That's when the stench flooded my nose and I wrinkled my nose

ruefully. "What's that smell?" I mewed confused at the stench.

Leafpaw stepped besides Dawnsky and sniffed a few fox lengths beside her before backing away. "It's coming from the dense forest over there!" My sister mewed turning to Dawnsky. "Is that ThunderClan's territory?"

Dawnsky and Mallowtail gave each other a bemused glance and broke into a fit of laughter. "You should see the look on both of your faces," Dawnsky purred. "But yes, that is ThunderClan's territory."

"That means that we are right at the border between SkyClan territory and ThunderClan territory," Mallowtail explained then pointed to a huge rock that looked to be a bit taller then Finchstar den.

"That's the Pointed Claw Rock, we use it as a territory marker," Dawnsky said leading us towards the huge rock.

Now that I got a good look I could see a brief shape of a cat claw. The tip of the rock was as sharp as fox teeth and at the bottom of the rock much smaller boulders surrounded its sides. "It looks similarly to a cat's claw!" Leafpaw mewed, her eyes shining.

"Are there any other cool places like this?" Leafpaw asked I could hear the excitement in her mew and I had to admit I was just as excited.

"Yes, a few more we will see on our stroll around the territory," Mallowtail said with a flick of his tail for us to follow him.

My gaze stayed on Pointed claw rock for a few seconds before I followed after Leafpaw and the warriors.

Another breeze bellowed passed us, a soft moaning that whipped past our ears as we trudged on. I had my jaws opened to try to catch a scent of prey, but I was surprised to find that there was hardly any scent.

"It's because of leaf-bare," Mallowtail murmured, watching my expression. "But don't worry we're somewhere much more

interesting than prey."

Curiosity flooded my face, and I tasted the air once more. The rapid noise of the water crashing by and the misty taste of the air made me realize where we must be. I've heard the warriors talking about its clear sky water and it's refreshing taste. I quickened my pace and dashed past Mallowtail and Dawnsky.

"Don't run too fast!" Mallowtail warning yowl had me slowing down my pace to a trot, and I realized that would be for the best if I did not want to topple into the river.

"Silentpaw!" Leafpaw yowled behind me. "Wait up you flat eared fur ball!" Leafpaw called chasing after me.

I padded through a thick leafy bush and stared in amazement, my mouth agape. There stood before me was the Silverpelt! It's shining blue water reflected the clear blue sky.

I trotted to the edge and looked around, the sound of water rushing down the rocks flooded my ears.

"Not too close," Dawnsky warned and nudged Leafpaw back. "Unless you both want to fall in, if you do, then only StarClan can help you at that moment.

I took a step back and fell besides Leafpaw, though my astonishment did not falter a bit. "The water is so clear!" Leafpaw said, her eyes scanning the Silverpelt and over the horizon.

"You two already know, but this is our part of the Silverprlt river. All of the clans can have access to the main stream of the silver pelt river, but all the Clans have a smaller stream of it that runs though each of our territories" Mallowtail explained.

"Now why don't we head for the main water way of the Silverpelt?" Dawnsky said taking the lead. Leafpaw and I walked in the middle, and Mallowtakl took the rear.

We soon came to a stop where the trees thinned out and the under growth was smaller. I pushed though some bushes and stood at the bank of the silver pelt river.

As I stared in awe, Dawnsky, Mallowtail, and Leafpaw came to my side. "Young apprentices, welcome to the Silverpelt river," Mallowtail announced with a flick of his ear.

Me and Leafpaw trotted up to the clear water. I felt sand mixed with snow underneath my paws. A chilly breeze washed over me which made my whiskers blow and my downward ears perk up for a few seconds which gave Leafpaw a mew of laughter.

"Floppy ear paw." Leafpaw said laughing more. I hissed softly at my sister who stuck her tongue at me.

Mallowtail and dawnsky came at our sides and Mallowtail flicked my ear with his tail. "Let's move on," the Tom mewed. "I want to finish our tour of the territory before sundown. It is already sun high."

We continued our way down the river bank until the river subsided to round a huge hill. "Wow! That hill is huge, what's up there?" I asked trotting to Mallowtail side.

My mentor laughed at my cluelessness and looked towards to the huge hill. "That's Gathering Hill, it's where all the Clans gather on the full moon and talk around things that have happened in their clan that moon." Mallowtail explained.

Dawnsky continued. "Yes, there is a huge tree at the top of it and that's where the leaders address their Clan. On the other side of the river, of course, is WindClan and RiverClan territory. If you were to travel left, that would belong to WindClan and on the right is RiverClan.

I looked towards the Gathering Hill once more though I couldn't see much of RiverClan nor WindClan's territory.

I trotted to Leafpaw's side and looked towards our mentors, who had their heads close together in deep conversation. "I think we're interrupting something," Leafoaw whispered to me, her eyes holding a glint of mischief.

I purred. *Those two have been getting along good.* I thought. *Even prior*

to getting us as apprentices.

As we walked I could feel my leg cramp up and flinched at the sudden pain. "Silentpaw are you alright?" Mallowtail asked turning towards me and I gave him a nod.

"Yes, just a leg cramp," I said doing my best to catch up with the others. As we walked I examined the ground and my surroundings.

The tree are now much taller and their are pine needles everywhere! I thought zigzagging my way around the pine needles while Mallowtail observed me.

"You're very silent footed," the tom said, watching my careful paw steps I set on the ground. "I can already tell you will be a excellent hunter," my mentor complimented, and i
I ducked my head in embarrassment at the praise.

"Maybe that's why Willownose named you Silentkit and not because you were too mouse brained to realize you were born yet," Leafpaw teased and gave me a shove.

"I heard Willownose named you Leafkit because when you were born you tried to suckle on a leaf and not her!" I purred, remembering Mouseclaw and Willownose talking about their favorite memories of us as kits.

"Oh yeah? Take this!" Leafpaw sneered at me before leaping and throwing me to the ground. "How's that for leaf suckle?" Leafpaw asked thrusting my muzzle into the dirt.

I hissed with a closed jaw and hunched my shoulders using all my strength to throw her off and then pin her down. "The only leaf suckler is you!" I mewed with a hiss of laughter.

I could feel Leafpaw about to throw me off when Mallowtail's growl came from behind us. "Get back over here now!" Mallowtail snapped, his fur spiking out. Dawnsky was at his side, her eyes round.

I was confused on why they were so mad when a horrible stench came from all around us. I gagged and jumped away from Leafpaw.

"What's that smell?" I hissed.

Leafpaw flattened her ears. "I think we're at the ShadowClan border."

Suddenly, a menacing growl came from the pine trees and a stocky brown tom with darker brown legs appeared followed by a dark gray tom with white legs, and a younger tom—who I guessed was a apprentice—with black fur with a white underbelly and legs.

The brown tom hissed. "Off the border kitty," he snarled, showing his sharp teeth at us. Leafpaw and I immediately backed away as Mallowtail stepped past us causing the brown tom to look up at him.

"Forgive me Pinethistle, these apprentices are young and don't know the borders yet," Mallowtail explained giving me and Leafpaw a glare that's when I realized we must have rolled onto a Clan border.

Whoops . . .

The dark gray tom stood at Pinethistles side. "I guess all SkyClan rats are borned as mouse brained, ay?" The tom asked , urning to the younger apprentice who gave him a nod.

"Our apprentices are fine cats, Stormsight, these apprentices only stepped a paw off the border. That's all," Dawnsky stated stepping besides Mallowtail.

Once the ShadowClan cat's fur lie flat, Mallowtail spoke in a more friendly tone. "How is Brindlestone with your kits Pinethistle?" Mallowtail asked the brown tom.

The brown Tom sighed in delight at the mention of his kits. "Strong and boisterous," he answered when the apprentice cut in.

"Yes, much better then any SkyClan cat!" The apprentice mewed looking towards me and Leafpaw.

"Quiet Shadepaw!" Stormsight hissed and gave a quick cuff around his ears.

That must be his mentor. I wondered if all mentors were this mean with their apprentices.

"We best be on our way," Mallowtail mewed, giving me and Leafpaw a glare that said *'we will talk about this soon.'* The other cats moved off as we continued our way down the border and I could feel the eyes of the ShadowClan patrol on my back.

08 | encounter

[image]

[EDITED]

*

2/7

L E A F

"Try again, Leafpaw," Dawnsky urged again. I let out an annoyed huff before settling down back to my paws. I threw my mentor a questioning look.

We were in the training hollow where Dawnsky was trying to teach me a battle move though I was struggling to maintain balance. Silentpaw and Mallowtail were a couple of fox-tail lengths away and I could see they were practicing trickier moves.

Silentpaw leaped over Mallowtail's back before clawing it. He quickly flipped over but the molly jumped away before he could crush her. She rushed at the tom and scored a few blows against his ears before darting again once more.

And here I am still trying to learn a basic mouse-brained move! I thought bitterly. I felt useless and ashamed the fact I wasn't able to do the move Dawnsky was teaching me. But I just couldn't get it right.

"What am I doing wrong?" I asked Dawnsky with a hint of frustration.

"When going on your hind legs and using your forepaws to swipe at your enemy, steady your tail to maintain balance. You keep swinging them from side to side which causes you to stumble," Dawnsky explained. She then paused and flicked her tail at me.

"Try again."

I gave a quick nod before trying once more. I lifted my forepaws and stumbled onto my hind legs. I struggled to stay still as my tail whipped excitedly from side to side. For a moment, I thought I would once again fail to do it.

It's not even a hard move! So why am I struggling so much? I nearly snarled in anger when I realized getting angry won't help me find a way to keep balance.

I swallowed tightly before calming myself down. I then took in Dawnsky's tip and tried focusing my attention to my tail. As I expected, it was swishing from side to side.

Allowing my tail to still, I then focused my pressure to my hind legs. With a stronger pressure, I would have more stability. Once my legs were stable, I swiped my forepaws before landing on the ground with a satisfied hiss. Dawnsky padded over to me and I saw her eyes gleaming.

"That was wonderful!" she exclaimed happily causing me to purr with satisfaction.

"Thanks! I just took your advice," I meowed before giving my chest a few conscious licks. Dawnsky then touched my shoulder with her tail and I quickly looked at her.

"I know you seem frustrated and envious, but try pushing those feelings away. Those are probably the reasons why you're struggling to focus right now," she mewed. I stared at her, surprised by her statement.

I bristled slightly. "I'm not—"

"It's okay to feel those type of feelings," Dawnsky interjected and I snapped my mouth closed. "But don't let them get the best of you. You're amazing in your way and Silentpaw is amazing in her way, alright?"

Dawnsky tilted her head at me and I nodded, suddenly feeling ashamed for being jealous of Silentpaw.

For StarClan's sake, she's my sister! I should feel proud for her . . . not

envious.

Dawnsky nodded at me. "Alright then, I'll show you one more move and then we'll do some hunting."

"Okay," I mumbled. I was better at hunting anywa. Dawnsky stood up from where she was and turned her head over to where Silentpaw and Mallowtail were practicing their moves.

"Mallowtail!" Dawnsky yowled causing him to stop in mid-air and turn his head over to Dawnsky. Silentpaw scrambled off of Mallowtail and looked over at us. The pale ginger tom neatly landed on the lightly frosted covered ground and said a quick few words to his apprentice.

"What is it, Dawnsky?" Mallowtail asked, now padding over to us. Dawnsky nodded at Silentpaw and me.

"I think they're ready for a more advanced move," she meowed. Silentpaw skirted over and sat beside me.

"Hi!" she whispered to me, curling her tail around the base of her paws.

I flicked my ear in acknowledgment. "Hey."

"How was training with Dawnsky?" she asked which caused my pelt to twitch. Well isn't this nice.

"Okay, I guess. I'm kinda clumsy which throws my balance and aims off," I admited unhappily. Silentpaw noticed my gloom and gave my ear a quick lick.

"I'm sure you'll get the hang of it," Silentpaw assured. "You shouldn't expect yourself to be perfect on our first battle training day."

I sighed, knowing that she had a point. "I guess."

The two of us then diverted our attention to Dawnsky and Mallowtail were talking quietly. I watched them and let out an amused snort.

Those two seem to take every moment talking about something, I thought. Just then, Dawnsky turned to us and I quickly straightened, perking my ears up.

"So, Mallowtail and I were thinking of teaching you an advanced move that can confuse your enemy while having an advantage over them," she explained. "We'll demonstrate how to do it then you will try it."

Silentpaw and me nodded in response. With that, Dawnsky turned to Mallowtail and told him to start.

Instantly, Mallowtail sprang at Dawnsky. Dawnsky scrambled to her hind legs and swiped her forepaws at him. Her paw met with his cheek causing him to losing balance and crash to the ground. Taking in his momentary stun, she lunged at Mallowtail. However the tom was ready and quickly rolled onto his back, exposing his belly.

Silentpaw bristled beside me while I watched in surprise as Dawnsky lunged at Mallowtail's exposed belly. "What is he doing?" she hissed fiercely. "Bellies are warriors weak spots. He shouldn't be exposing them to his enemy!"

I frowned, agreeing silently. However, Mallowtail was a reasonable cat, he wouldn't expose his belly without a reason. Suddenly it clicked that he was baiting Dawnsky into attacking his weak spot.

I narrowed my eyes and dug my paws into the ground, excitement coursing through me.

Just as Dawnsky was about to pin him, Mallowtail jabbed his hind leg with a powerful kick. Dawnsky's chest met with his leg and she was then flung backwards into the snow.

I watched in astonishment and gave my tail a satisfied lash. "That was so cool!" I exclaimed. Silentpaw beside me nodded eagerly, her tail swishing and her fur fluffed out.

The two of us watched as Mallowtail leaped forward and quickly pinned Dawnsky. The tortoiseshell struggled for a few moments

before going limp. Mallowtail stood over her and stared at her haughtily.

"Got you," he teased.

Dawnsky huffed good humorously. "Get off me you fur-ball!"

Mallowtail purred and scrambled off her, allowing Dawnsky to get up and shake the snow off her fur. She inspected it before giving Mallowtail a nod. "That was great!"

Twitching her ear, Dawnsky turned toward us and met our appalled gazes. "And that," she meowed, "is how you do the move."

"Remember, this move is risky," Mallowtail quickly added. He sat beside Dawnsky. "You need to be precise on your timing and if not the enemy will have an advantage over your exposed belly. One mistake and it could lead to a fatal injury, however, of course through time and experience, your reaction time will be enough to counter this move should there happen to be a mistake."

I tipped my head to one side and frowned. "So then why show us? It is our first day of battle training after all."

"SkyClan cats have a specialty of strong hind legs that allow them to climb trees and hunt huge birds. We will need to train your legs into becoming use to being used more often. Understanding this battle move will allow you to understand what muscles you have to use and how much power you should inflict on it," Mallowtail explained. "It will also build the needed muscles that will help you guys climb later on."

"I see," I mewed.

"Now try doing it with Silentpaw. Silentpaw lung at Leafpaw and Leafpaw, you try using the technique."

I nodded slowly, wondering whether I would be able to do it when Silentpaw gave me a light shove. "You'll be fine, fur-ball."

I blinked at her gratefully before padding over to a area that wasn't covered in snow. Silentpaw crouched down and narrowed her eyes

at me and I could tell she was trying to find out a way to attack me. I braced myself and fluffed my fur out, making sure to keep my instincts sharp.

Then, Silentpaw took the move. Without a second thought, she leaped at me high into the air and if I wasn't fighting her I would've gaped at her agility. I narrowly dodged her attack and quickly spun around. Silentpaw dropped to the ground before spinning around quickly and lunging at me once again.

Great StarClan, she's fast!

However, this time I wasn't ready for her blunt speed. She crashed into me and I was instantly thrown into the dirt with a terrifying impact. I let out a grunt of pain and saw Silentpaw ready to spring at me once more. Deciding to use the move Mallowtail showed us, I made myself go limp.

I closed my eyes and decided to let my instincts tell me what to do. Getting my hind legs ready, I lift it and quickly jab it into the air. My leg was instantly met with Silentpaw's chest and the momentum from the kick threw Silentpaw back into the ground. I scrambled up and saw Silentpaw laying on the ground, shocked.

Wasting no time, I ran over to her and pinned my paw on her scruff. Silnetpaw lifted her head and stared at me.

"That was amazing!" she exclaimed.

I gleamed and unpinned the flat eared fur-ball. "So was yours dashing and leaping at me."

I got off Silentpaw and allowed her to get up. She shook her fur which had grit, dirt, and snow on it and gave it a quick few licks. Mallowtail and Dawnsky padded up to us.

"That was great, Leafpaw!" Dawnsky praised. My ear tips burned slightly and I gave my chest a couple of licks.

"And Silentpaw that was a great technique you used," Mallowtail said to Silentpaw and flicked her folded ears with his tail.

I nodded. "Yeah, she barely gave me time to regain my balance."

Silentpaw purred while Mallowtail gazed approvingly at his apprentice. "You definitely have well footing. Your speed will have an advantage over your enemies."

Dawnsky stalked a few fox-tail length away from us and sniffed the air. Her tail gave a single twitch and she turned her head toward us. The three of us turned and looked at her.

"We should start hunting now," she meowed. "As tired as you may be, our clan is short on prey. We'll need to salvage as many as we can."

Mallowtail nodded. "Let's go separately. Me and Silentpaw will head that way." He pointed toward the directions where the trees grew thicker and larger. "We'll see if we can try catching squirrels there."

"We'll head toward the ShadowClan border and see if we can catch any voles," Dawnsky finished.

"Good luck!" I whispered to Silentpaw before padding after Dawnsky. Silentpaw nodded before bounding to Mallowtail's side and disappearing into the depths of the trees.

The two of us quietly padded through the thicket and kept our ears pricked for any signs of prey. Just then Dawnsky stopped walking, though she continued to sniff the air. I halted, my paws skidding against the ground.

"What's wrong?" I prompted. Dawnsky turned her head toward me.

"I was thinking that the two of us should separate in finding prey," she said. "I'm not assessing you, so we don't have to be together. Going separately will cover more grounds."

I thought for a moment before agreeing. "Alright. I'll head toward the ShadowClan border," I meowed.

Dawnsky nodded. "I'll stick around here. If anything happens, just yowl. And be careful, you know that ShadowClan warriors are not very friendly when it comes to borders."

I flicked my ear in acknowledgment. "Okay."

Turning around swiftly, I ran toward the ShadowClan border. I ran for a few heartbeats before stopping abruptly. Lifting my head into the air, I sniffed, checking for any signs of prey.

After sniffing around for a bit, I suddenly caught a strong smell of vole. It suddenly wafted over me that I wasted no time bolting after it. Once the smell of the vole became more evident, I stopped and looked around, suddenly confused.

The stench had suddenly gotten stronger but it didn't smell . . . like a vole? There was a rotting smell and it mixed in with the vole scent, consuming me with confusion.

I walked closer to the stench which happens to be behind a bush. I was about to pad over to it when a stronger scent stopped me in my tracks. Recognizing the smell, I froze in my spot.

Foxdung, I nearly crossed the ShadowClan border!

I was about to whirl around and streak back into the forest when a rustle among the thicket made my snap my head toward the direction.

The bushes rustled once more and suddenly a cat appeared from the bushes. Yellow eyes stared back at my darkish blue ones. The tom padded out of the bushes and stared back at me with cold, quiet eyes. He tipped his head to one side and stared at me narrowed eyes.

"What's this? More Skyclan cats sneaking at our border?" he questioned. There was an edge to his voice.

Well, get at it I suppose.

I was about to unsheathe my claws when I caught myself at the moment. Judging by the size of the tom, he couldn't have been anymore than an apprentice. I strained my ears and heard nothing of Dawnsky.

I thought for a moment—calling Dawnsky will bring unnecessary

attention and not to mind the fact that this would've been my second time crossing the border. I didn't want to provoke the tom because I wasn't sure if he was part of a patrol or if any other ShadowClan warriors were around. I definitely didn't want a fight ensured between the two Clans when I hadn't done anything wrong. To be fair, the rotting smell had come from their side of the border and had mixed in with SkyClan's scent.

"No. Why would I do that?" I shook my head and heaved a sigh.

"I don't see any other reasons why you would be at the border," he replied and gave his ear a twitch.

"I assure you, I don't intend to *cross* your border for ill intentions," I muttered crossly. "I've happened to crash in the border after catching a vile stench."

"Which happens to be on our border." The tom narrowed his eyes at me and I could see distrust lingering in his eyes. "And it happens to be a half eaten vole."

I freeze in my spot and felt myself go rigid. *Great! Now look at what I have gotten into,* I think to myself, infuriated. And this mouse brained apprentice won't let this go. Can't he see I had no intentions of purposely going to his border?

"Okay, no need to get so defensive," I meowed though I curled my paws into the dirt to keep my anger in. I apparently was getting impatient since any ShadowClan warriors or Dawnsky could appear any moment and the situation could get ugly. "I was hunting near the border and the vole stench threw me off. I never crossed the border."

"Is that so?" he murmured, but his voice was filled with sarcasm and I could see he wasn't convinced which snapped me up to my boiling point.

"Great StarClan, are you always this mouse-brained?" I questioned, loosening my shoulder. "Can you not smell that SkyClan's scent can't be on it?"

The tom chuckled and twitched his ear. "I'm just messing with you, I know you didn't do this."

I snarled at him and sent him a lethal glare. He stopped swishing his tail and glanced at me. There was a shift in his eyes, and I noticed that there was a glint of amusement behind them. I stiffened slightly, laying my ears back.

Was he mocking me?

"Okay, I'm sorry." He rolled his eyes. "Didn't know that SkyClan was this uptight."

I showed him my teeth before sitting back on my haunches. "Aren't you cheeky."

"I'm Thornpaw, by the way," he mewed, nodding his head as he spoke.

"I'm Leafpaw," I answered back. Sniffing, I turned my head to the direction where the foul stench was coming from. It was hard not to smell since the entire area smelled of crow-food. "Is ShadowClan always this messy?"

Thornpaw gave me an annoyed glance. "Are you frog-brained? Of course not. We don't half eat our prey and leave it rotting around."

I purred and licked my chest. "I know, I'm just messing with you."

Thornpaw simply grunted and shook his head.

"Though, that doesn't ease my question, what is this stench and how did it happen?" I meowed. "Did an animal nearby do this?"

The dark, matted, brown tom shook his head once more. "No, before I came across you, I was checking out this pungent aura since I was hunting. I checked it out, but there wasn't any familiar animal scent around, and the tracks surrounding the prey looked similar to a cat."

My eyes widened. "You mean a cat did this?"

"Not any ShadowClan cat, that's for sure. I didn't catch any ShadowClan scent, but it did smell like another cat."

Alarm spiked through my pelt. Could it have been the rouges that attacked the SkyClan patrol moons ago? If they were in our territory, they could have gone into ShadowClan's territory and hunted some of their prey.

I looked down at my paws. This couldn't be good for any Clans. If rouges could easily maneuver through territories like this with ease then they could easily wreck havoc upon the Clans themselves, or cause tension between Clans with such vile prey loot so close to Clan borders.

Unless they did this on purpose? Any rouge would have the common sense to hunt in the area where many cats wouldn't go, and that would happen to be in the deeper part of the Clan territory. However, the prey that was killed happened to be right between the two Clans, and that couldn't have been a coincidence. Killing and eating it here would be a risk of being caught, yet they still did it and managed to get away with it.

Whoever these cats were, they were smart and they happened to understand how Clans work. The question lingering in the back of my head was how.

How did they know this information and how were they able to do this?

I was so lost in thought that I hadn't heard Thornpaw hissing my name. I felt a jab to my side and immediately snapped out of my thoughts. I blinked at him and frowned. "What?"

"My clan mates are heading this way, you need to go," he growled and sent a quick look over his shoulder.

"But what about the prey—"

"I'll tell them it was a rouge and I'll make it clear that SkyClan wasn't involved."

I relaxed and ducked my head. "Okay, thank you," I whispered

before dashing into the comfort of SkyClan's trees. I had to resume my hunting anyway, but I felt grateful for the understanding of the young ShadowClan's apprentice.

His name flew threw my head as I slowed down to pick up any more scents.

Thornpaw.

* * *

Walking through the entrance, I tried not shame the small starling that I had caught. Dawnsky managed to catch a sparrow while Silentpaw and Mallowtail caught a squirrel and a shrew. The four of us walked over to the fresh kill pile and dropped whatever we caught onto the meager pile.

I was tempted to snatch up the sparrow and eat it, but instead I grabbed the squirrel and headed toward the elders den. I knew that it was harder for the elders, so feeding them was more important than warriors.

"Wait up!" A voice called out as I was about to make my way to the den. Turning around, I saw Silentpaw bounding over to me with a mischievous look in her blue-green eyes. "Not taking the credit on the squirrel are you?"

I let out an amused snort. "No, of course not."

The two of us then walked over to the elders den. Ducking into the cave, I saw the silhouetted figures of Flakenose and Flowerheart.

"We brought fresh kill," Silentpaw butted in.

Flowerheart purred when she saw us. "That's wonderful, Foxwhisker was starting to complain he was hungry, and he is always grumpy whenever he is hungry."

The ginger tom huffed. "I am not!"

"I caught it with Mallowtail," Silentpaw said proudly. I padded more deeper into the den and dropped the squirrel near Flowerheart and

Flakenose. The three of them bent down and began eating. Foxwhisker thanked us and we left the den.

"I'm starving," Silentpaw hissed as we ducked out of the den.

"Yeah me too," I meowed. The two of us headed to the fresh kill pile and stared at it sorrowfully. Besides the prey we caught, there wasn't much to the pile. I sighed and wondered if any other hunting patrols came back or caught anything.

I picked a sparrow from the pile and padded over to a side and settled down. Silentpaw sat down with a small shrew. She sighed. "Nothing much," she mumbled before taking a bite.

I didn't say anything except for just biting into my sparrow. We ate quietly while watching the camp. Petalshade was lounging in near the nursery while Willownose sat next to her, talking. Swiftleap sat near the fresh kill pile though his eyes were trained on the camp entrance. His pelt was prickling and his ears were strained as if he was listening for something. I stared at him confused, but I didn't bother too much of it. As we ate, the camp entrance suddenly rustled. I lifted my head and watched as Leapflight, Stoneheart, and Honeypaw walked into the clearing.

Swiftleap sprang up from his spot and hurried over to Honeypaw.

"I passed!" she hissed excitedly to the tom. Swiftleap purred at the pale ginger she-cat and rubbed his muzzle against hers.

"I'm so proud of you!" he said as he pulled back and gave her ear a gentle lick.

I blinked in surprise. Silentpaw gasped. "I forgot that her warrior assessment was today!"

"Me too," I meowed. "Guess the training made me forget."

Leapflight purred happily at her apprentice. "I'll go tell Finchstar."

Honeypaw nodded though her eyes held a glint of worry when Leapflight mentioned Finchstar. I felt surprised. Shouldn't she feel proud that Leapflight is going to tell her mother yet she looked

unhappy and worried?

Swiftleap, however, seemed to be more happier than Honeypaw was. He weaved around the pale ginger she cat, praising her and saying that he knew that she would pass while Stoneheart watched them with an amused look.

I finished my sparrow and quickly cleaned my whiskers before bounding closer to the rockslide. As I made my way there, I froze when a sudden hiss flooded into my ear. I stopped in my tracks and pricked my ears. Silentpaw who was bounding over to me stopped by my side and threw me a confused glance. She opened her mouth to say something however I slapped my tail over her mouth and threw her a look for her to stop where she was.

"Are you seriously thinking of becoming a medicine cat?" A voice growled though the brambles.

Blackkit!

"Yes I am," a strong voice responded to Blackkit. *That must be Ivykit,* I thought. Silentpaw stiffened beside me, but she didn't say anything. The two of us continued to eavesdrop on the two siblings.

"Why?!" Blackkit snarled. "You were suppose to be a warrior like me! So one day I can be leader and you can be deputy."

Ivykit looked baffled. "That's when we were kits, Blackkit. I can choose my own path can't I? And besides I'll be your medicine cat while you're the leader."

Blackkit remained silent for a moment before his growl erupted the silence. "You're weak."

"What?" Ivykit hissed though I heard the waver in her voice. I swallowed back my shock. I never thought of Blackkit this way.

"You only want to be a medicine cat because you're too weak to be a deputy," he spat. "Medicine cats are for weaklings like you. You were never meant to be a warrior let alone a deputy anyways."

Ivykit stayed silent and suddenly I decided to interrupt the two of

them. Blackkit had no right talking to her like that. I gave a quick look to Silentpaw and hoped she understood what I was going to do. Taking a few steps back, I traced my steps back to Ivykit and Blackkit.

"Um, is anyone there?" I meowed.

There was a silence before the brambles rustled revealing Blackkit and Ivykit. Blackkit scowled at me. "What are you doing here?"

"We just heard something here," I told them casually and shrugged. "Anyways, Finchstar is hosting a meeting, you two better come." Without saying anything more, I quickly walked over to where everyone was gathering. Silentpaw padded after me.

"I can't believe Blackkit was acting like that to his own sibling," Silentpaw meowed quietly.

"Yeah," I mumbled. "Honestly, there is just something off about Blackkit. He's more aggressive than usual."

I couldn't help but wonder why he acted the way he is as Silentpaw and I sat down near Mouseclaw and Willownose as the Clan began to gather around the Meeting Rock.

09 | calico

2/18

S I L E N T

"Blackpaw!"
"Ivypaw!"
"Blackpaw!"
"Ivypaw!"

The clan chanted the new apprentices name as they greeted their new mentors. Ivypaw stood proudly next to Parsleyseed while Blackpaw sat besides Ravenwing.

I stood next to Mallowtail at the entrance of the thorn barrier waiting patiently. Leafpaw, me, and our mentors are supposed to go on a hunting patrol today and I was full of excitement.

I turned my head towards Petalshade and Embernose, Ivypaw and Blackpaws parents. Their eyes were shining with pride as they looked at their newly apprenticed kits. Finchstar stood in the middle of the clearing watching the two new apprentices with bright eyes. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Honeywisp by the warriors den, the newly made warriors eyes shone with envy.

Why would she be jealous? I asked myself. Honeywisp's envious gaze vanished as Swiftleap came to her side and gently licked her ear, the twp warriors had become mates not long after Honeywisps warrior ceremony and its safe to say no cat was surprised.

I watched as Parsleyseed led Ivypaw into his den while Blackpaw and Ravenwing headed for the thorn barrier. As they passed I could feel Blackpaws furious gaze on me, but I ignored the mouse-brained apprentice. *If he wants to act like a kit that's fine by me,* I thought resting my tail over my paws.

I looked towards the Rockslide path to see Leafpaw and Dawnsky

racing down and stopping in front of me and Mallowtail. "Sorry we're late, Leafpaw decided to over sleep!" Dawnsky let out a mew of laughter and I snickered.

"I told you that you shouldn't have eaten so much of that hawk!" I teased and Leafpaw let out a low hiss of laughter. "You're one to talk, you ate a lot of that stupid bird, too!" Leafpaw growled.

I let out a huff. Any cat could admit the hawk the hunting patrol took down the pervious night was mouth watering. The patrol—consisted of Cloudfur, Stoneheart, Leapflight, and Embernose—came back to camp to many praises and cheers of happiness.

"One day I'll be able to take down a hawk with one paw," I declared, raising a paw and unsheathing my sharp claws.

"If you want to do that one day, you'll have to keep up your patrol," Mallowtail mewed flicking my folded ear then Leafpaw's straight one.

Mallowtail came up the rear while Dawnsky led us towards the Pointed Rock Claw. "No patrol has hunted there for days! There is sure to be prey," Dawnsky stated, leading us through the dense trees and under growth.

There had been no more signs of rouges, but Finchstar refuses to keep her guard down. "Just because the rouges are not attacking now does not mean they won't soon," the SkyClan leader said with her usual booming yowl.

The undergrowth decreased and soon we stood face to face with the pointed claw rock, its top looking as sharp as a eagles talons. Mallowtail crept to Dawnsky side and both of the older warriors turned to me and my sister.

"We're gonna make this hunting fun." dawnsky started and Mallowtail continued. "Me and Dawnsky will wait for the 2 of you at the pointed claw rock and y'all have to catch as much prey as you can." At this challenge me and Leafpaw both looked at our mentors with interest.

"Whoever wins gets no dawn patrols for a half moon." Mallowtail stated. *Ive only been on one dawn patrol and I hated it so this should be fun!* I thought. Me and Leafpaw both jumped up. "We accept!" We both hissed.

Dawnsky nodded approvingly at our eagerness. "Leafpaw you will go further towards the silver pelt river and Silentpaw you will head the opposite direction. You will have until the sun is at its highest! And remember who ever wins get no dawn patrols for a half moon!" Dawnsky said signaling us to start with a flick of her tail.

With that I raced towards my destination, I was glad Dawnsky gave me this direction because I know a great spot for prey in a small clearer with herbs surrounding it. *Perfect place for prey!* I thought picking up my speed.

i stopped dead in my tracks as a sniff of rabbit filled my nose. I opened my mouth to take in the scent. "Just passed here." I whispered following the rabbit mouth watering scent.

After a few moments of tracking the scent I stopped when the bushes ahead of me swished, I crouch in the short undergrowth that surrounded me and watched as a fat rabbit hopped out from the bush and started chewing on some yellow herb.

I unsheathed my claws and crept towards the rabbit, my eyes narrowed. I hunched my shoulders, tested the distance, and leaped. The rabbit let out a squeak of surprise and tried to run but my claws already scrapped its gray pelt.

I snapped my jaws around the rabbits neck and its tiny squeaky deafened and it went limp. *Thank you StarClan for this prey* I thanked lifting up my rabbit and carrying it towards a herb bush.

"Nothing will find you under these foul herbs." I said covering the limp rabbit with leaves.

Just as I finished burying the rabbit the smell of a quail caught my attention. I opened my mouth and looks around, it was like the scent was above me?

I looked up and on a thick branch I noticed a quail in a nest with 4 baby quails surrounding it. I'd never hunted quail before, I've only had it once because the warriors say their very hard to catch.

An idea came to my mind and I started digging at the dirt underneath the bushes. After a few minutes I found 5 worms and picked them up with a claw. Their tiny little bodies felt weird as they brushed my fur bit I continued to hop to the venture of the clearing and place the worms next to a strong smelling berry bush.

I backed out of the clearing and made my way to the bottom of the tree the quails nested. I could see the mother quail about to leave for the worms so I had to move fast. There was a very low branch only 1 or 2 fox lengths above me and I jumped onto it.

I regained my balance and sunk my claws into the bark. i hunched my shoulders and leaped to the next branch that was a very for fox lengths up.

I didn't realize how far the branch was and had to grip onto the tree so I wouldn't fall. I gripped my claws in the bark and contained up the tree.

After a few more moments of climbing i reached the branch that was above the quails nest. I snickered as the quail mom flew down the branch and started picking up the worms.

The mother ate 3 of the worms before getting ready to fly back to her nest, where I was ready for the attack. I gently hopped down to the branch the quail nest was and watched as the quail baby's cried for their mother.

I remained still as a stone as the quail mother started feeding her babies. Right as the mother was about to leave to get the rest of the worms I speed crawled towards the nest and sank my teeth into the quail mothers wing as she was about to take off.

The quail squawked and screeched before I was able to drag it down and take the kill bite into its neck. I stared proudly at my catch when the sound of the baby quails caught my attention.

I suddenly wondered how I was going to get down when I noticed how well the mother quail had built her next. *Maybe I can carry the mother and babies down in the nest!* I thought.

I placed the mother quail in the nest and her baby ruffled around her looking for the food they thought she had for them.

The 5 baby quails were making enough noise so I quickly killed them before they frightened the whole mountain range. With the dead quail family in their nest I carefully picked up the birds nest and started leaping from branch to branch down the tree.

Once i got down I looked towards the sun and realized the sun was at its highest! "I better hurry!" I mewed trotting over to where I buried the rabbit.

I put the nest down and threw the limp rabbit over my back and Ickes the quail nest back up. The warm scent of the prey was mouth watering as I trotted through the trees making my way back to the pointed claw rock.

As i got closer to the pointed claw rock i could hear voices. I sniffed and picked up Mallowtail, Dawnsky, and Leafpaws scent. I trotted into the clearing proudly with my catches.

"Finally your back!" Mallowtail mewed with a flick of his bushy tail. I looked towards Leafpaw and saw she had a rabbit to with 2 voles.

Dawnsky sniffed and her eyes widened. "Is that quail?" The tortoiseshell asked. I placed down the quail nest and pulled my rabbit off my back. "Yep! I climbed a tree and got the whole family!" I mewed proudly.

Mallowtail brushed his muzzle to mine. "Amazing job and good to, the elders have been wishing for quail for the past few days." Mallowtail told me.

Leafpaw came to my side and sniffed at the birds nest. "Ooo, I haven't had quail in a few moons! I hope your sharing." Leafpaw said and I let out a mew of laughter.

"Alright I'll help with your rabbit Silentpaw and Dawnsky can help

Leafpaw." Mallowtail stated picking up my rabbit, while Dawnsky picked up Leafpaws voles.

Just as we were about to head away from the pointed claw rock I got a feeling of being watched. i turned towards the bushes and stared at them for a few moments. "Silentpaw?" Leafpaw mewed looking confused.

by now Dawnsky and Mallowtail and stooped to and both had their ears perked and mouths open to smell. "Apprentices, take your prey and hide in the bushes." Dawnsky said pointing to a thick area full of under growth.

Still slightly confused we obeyed and hid in the bushes, our prey deeper in the under growth next to some herbs to hide their blood scent. Mallowtail and dawnsky circled the clearing and hissed. "I can smell you! Come out!" Mallowtail yowled.

Suddenly a yowl broke though the air and 4 cats leaped from behind the pointed claw rock and faced Mallowtail and Dawnsky. The cats smell was nothing of a clan cats. *These must be the rouges!* I thought.

The lead cat took a step forwards, it was a Tom with black fur and white stripes with bright hazel eyes. Behind him was a ginger and black Tom with a torn ear and a pointed white tail tip, 2 younger looking cats stood behind the rouges they looked to be close me and Leafpaws age.

One was a black she-cat with light blue eyes and a stump tail while the other was a white, black, and gold calico with forest green eyes. I felt lost in those forest green eyes and didn't notice the black Tom starting to speak in a raspy tone.

"I am Fang." rasped the black Tom with white stripes, he snarled with his words revealing yellow teeth. Fang pointed with his tail to the ginger and black tom. "This is flint, and those are Bee and hawk." The tom said first pointing to the black she-cat then the calico she-cat.

Dawnsky snarled. "This is SkyClan territory! You rouges have no

business here." The tortoiseshell snapped unsheathing her claws. Mallowtail stepped in front of Dawnsky and snapped in a unwelcoming tone. "What brings you here?" He asked.

"Oh nothing important, just, for food!" Fang yowled and leaped at Mallowtail. The 2 toms went crashing in the undergrowth while Flint flung himself at Dawnsky.

Bee rushed to help Flint while Hawk was heading to help Fang. *I gotta stop that rouge!* I thought leaping from the bushes and blocking Hawks path.

The rouge yelped in surprise as I lunged at her. Leafpaw left the bushes to so she could help Dawnsky.

Hawk was bigger then me but I was faster. I leaped onto the rouges back and sank my claws into her pelt, she yowled in pain and rolled over to shake me off leaving me stunned.

Then I remembered the move Leafpaw used during our training session. Just as Hawk was leaping for me and kicked out my back legs and he rouge slammed into them and fell backwards.

I took no time and pinned the rouge she-cat down. A frightened yowl rose from the clearing and I turned to see Leafpaw pinned to the ground by Flint. *Where's Dawnsky!?!* I thought quickly and saw the she-cats leg had been hurt and she needed time to rest for a few moments

The rouge Bee was swiping pathetic paw swipes at her muzzle. I leaped away from Hawk and ran towards flint and Leafpaw. I leaped to the rouge and slammed into the toms side and both went flying.

I sprung up to see Dawnsky yowling and running at Flint, the 2 went crashing into the under growth. I ran over to Leafpaw. "I'm fine, just shocked, those rouges are fat!" She mewed with a hint of laughter.

I heard hissing and saw Hawk and Bee circling me and Leafpaw. "Stand together." Leafpaw whispered and we stood together, pelts

touching, facing our enemies.

Bee was snarling at Leafpaw while Hawk eyed me with a glint of amusement. Suddenly Hawk leaped at me but half leap I leaped at her too and we both crashing onto the ground.

i sprung up and charged at Hawk sinking my teeth into her shoulder. The calico yowled and gripped my forearm in her teeth. I shoved my forearm away and swiped at Hawks muzzle letting go of her shoulder.

Suddenly a new move came to my mind and I set my gaze on the pointed claw rock. I snickered and ran towards it i could hear Hawk behind me.

I charged at the rock and leaped into its flat surface before springing back and landing on top of Hawk. The she-cat let out a yowl of shock as I pinned her down, sinking my claws into her back, and thrusting her muzzle in the dirt.

"Eat dirt you fox hearted rouge!" I yowled. i turned towards Leafpaw to see her pinning down Bee.

The bushes went wild as Mallowtail limped out with Fang being dragged behind him. For a second I thought the rouge was dead but he was but shocked. Mallowtail looked pleased to see Hawk and Bee down.

"Where's Dawnsky?" The deputy asked, as if on cue Dawnsky trotted out the bushes with mews of laughter. "That flint rouge ran away before I can give him another wound to think about." The tortoiseshell laughed.

And then purred as she noticed Leafpaw with Bee pinned down. Mallowtail trotted to the pointed claw rock and though Fang against the stone. "Leave this territory before I bring your eyes as a reward for our victory!" The deputy snapped letting go of Fang.

The battered tom jumped up and me and Leafpaw let go of Bee and Hawk. Just as the rouges were leaving Bee yowled. "You haven't seen the last of us!" The black she-cat yowled before following Fang.

"Lets get our prey then report this to Finchstar." Mallowtail mewed and started making his way to where to hid the prey. Leafpaw and Dawnsky followed him, as I was about to join them I turned around and saw Hawk staring at me.

Though the calicos eyes weren't aggressive or fearful they were of respect and envy? We locked eyes for a few moments before I turned and walked away.

A part of me hoped I would see that Rouge again.

10 | gathering

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L E A F

I sat up from my nest and tried not to wince from the wounds that stung me. My shoulders tense and I hunch my shoulders. It has been nearly a week ever since our patrol had been attacked by the rouges.

I remembered coming into the clan and how everyone was shocked to come in with wounds. Willownose wouldn't stop hovering and fretting over us. She was so worried that she even accompanied us to the medicine cat den. When we went in there, I saw Ivypaw leaning over a bundle of herbs.

Parsleyseed came out of the other room and frowned when he saw us. It turned out that he was low on herbs and struggled to give poultices to four cats all heavily injured.

I stretched in my nest slightly and examined the wound on my hind leg. A shallow but long scratch ran down from the bone of the leg. I scowled as I remembered it was the cat named Bee who did it.

Thank you so much for this fox dung wound!

The wound, luckily, wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. I had a slight limp but it didn't prevent me from walking or being able to hunt. I would just have to make sure poultice would be put on it often to keep the infection out. The best part was that I was allowed to go to the gathering.

I became excited at the thought of going to the gathering. What was it like? Would all the leaders be there?

I couldn't imagine all of the five clans being together without fighting. I shudder at the thought of other clans turning claws

against another.

However I did feel excited to see other apprentices from other clans. Dawnsky told me that every clan had their own talents that help them thrive in ways that differs from us. So in general, I was excited. However, gathering wasn't until moon high and right now the sun was barely up.

I got up from my nest and ducked out of the den. Outside Blackpaw and Ravenwing sat a few mouse tail length away from the fresh kill. Silentpaw was talking to Mouseclaw excitedly while Mallowtail made his way over to them. The sun slowly rose over the hill, its rays peaking over the horizon.

Bounding myself down the rockslide, I made my way over to the fresh kill pile. Luckily the hunting patrol must've came back because the pile was filled with delicious prey. Snatching a wren from the pile, I settled myself down and began eating it.

"Hey Leafpaw," Dawnsky calls out. I turn my head toward her and watched as she bounded over to me. "We're going to do some battle training with Blackpaw and Ravenwing alright?"

I swallowed the morsel of wren and stared at Dawnsky. *Seriously?* I thought ruefully. *A day with that fox dung?*

"Sure," I muttered then stuffed my muzzle into the wren unhappily. Dawnsky nodded and then padded away leaving me to mop over the fact I had to train with Blackpaw. I knew that being an apprentice, avoiding that was now unavoidable. I still haven't forgotten the things he said to Ivypaw.

Who could say such things to their siblings? If I said anything like that to Silentpaw, I would never forgive myself for saying such things.

Finishing my wren, I gave my whiskers a quick clean before getting up and making my way over to Dawnsky whom was talking to Ravenwing. Blackpaw stood next to Ravenwing and was gazing me with cold eyes. I remembered Silentpaw telling me earlier on how Blackpaw glared at her during his apprentice ceremony.

Wanna have a eye staring contest with me? I thought, seething with annoyance. *Would it make a difference if I scratched your eyes out?*

Ignoring Blackpaw, I sat beside Dawnsky. She looked at me. "Okay now that Leafpaw is here we should get going."

Ravenwing nodded and began walking over to the entrance. I padded beside my mentor and squeeze through the thorn barrier before we were met in the cold dense forrest.

"Where are we going to train?" I ask Dawnsky. Dawnsky twitched her ear.

"We're going to do some advanced battle moves," she explained. "Finchstar wants you guys to be ready if another rouge attack happens."

I wondered if I could actually fight Blackpaw with an injured leg. The type of cat he is, I was sure he would aim for my weak spot. I growled at the thought. If he even tries t do that, I'll make sure he'll get some heavy blows to his ears. I will not get injured from some apprentice and miss out my first day of the gathering.

We walked for a while until we came to the training area, which was called the Training Hollow. The area was a big ditch in the ground. A tree trunk laid over the ditch by the edges and made it a perfect ladder for beginners in tree fighting or hunting sessions.

We skidded down the steep sides of the hollow and bounded down to the middle of the clearing.

"We'll first work on basic defense moves," Ravenwing meowed once we settled to the clearing. "It's best to know how to defend yourself when your are being attacked. Rouges have a way with fighting."

Blackpaw, however, wasn't pleased by Ravenwing's statement. "Shouldn't we learn how to attack first?"

Ravenwing growled. "Both are important but defending yourself is vital when necessary."

Blackpaw shrugged nonchalantly, not really caring. I rolled my

eyes. I already knew he is going to be a troublemaker. Dawnsky decided to demonstrate a move that will likely happen in battles and how to defend yourself out of it.

"Most of the time, you'll find yourself pinned by another cat by the flank," Dawnsky explained. "Most of the time, there is a way to throw them off but you'll need to practice and experience of course."

"So how do we do it?" I quipped.

"One way to to do is by going limp," Dawnsky meowed. "If you are pinned that is. By allowing yourself to relax, your enemy will lose their grip on you and they will momentarily go limp. Take that advantage and then suddenly explode out of their grip—attack them full on force and catch them by surprise."

She looked at me and Blackpaw. "Do you understand?"

I nodded. "Alright. This is going to be a basic battle training session so I'd rather want you two fight. The two of us will assess your skills and will improve on them later on."

I turned to Blackpaw and narrowed my eyes at him. The two of us circled each other with narrowed eyes, ready to spring at each other the moment one of us faltered. Growling, I decided to take the move.

I sprang forward with sudden force, catching Blackpaw by surprise. However the black tom shook out of his surprise and quickly recoiled away. My paws met the ground and before I could spring at him again he slammed his paw at my cheek, reeling me backwards.

I hissed in annoyance. *Cheeky fox.*

Blackpaw sprang at me as I scrambled to find my footing. However, my reflexes failed when I saw him jump at my back and scored a few blows on my flanks. Grunting, I reared on my hind legs and shook Blackpaw off then whirling around, lunging at him. Blackpaw let out a startled squeak and crashed onto the ground. However, he

didn't give up so easily.

Before I could pin him, he quickly rolled away from my range and scrambled away. He then disappeared into the growth making me growl in frustration.

Not like he can hide in the snow with his black pelt anyways, I thought. I fluffed my fur out and pricked my ears, straining to hear any type of noise. And then. I heard it. Even if it was a slight rustle, I whipped my head around and faced the direction.

Now, it's my turn to attack.

Swiftly and quietly, I quickly made my way over to where I heard the rustle. I stopped and lifted my head into the air hissing. *Stupid kit-apprentice.* I thought.

He's trying to get a surprise attack from the under growth, well he's got another thing coming!

Just then Blackpaw leaped from the undergrowth, his eyes narrowed with teeth and claws bared. With Blackpaw in the air, I sprung forward towards him and slapped my paw across his face that made us both go tumbling into the under growth. *Pay back!*

I had gotten disconnected from Blackpaw when we rolled into the undergrowth. Just as a regained my footing and saw him still winded on his side I sprung towards and pushed the younger apprentice into the snow and pinned him there.

Blackpaw hissed and claws but my grip was strong and I wouldn't let go until Dawnsky and Ravenwing came bounding through the under growth towards us. Dawnsky had a proud look on his face while Ravenwing mouth formed a snarl of rage.

"Leafpaw that mid leap belly throw was brilliant!" Dawnsky mewed giving me a flick with her tail. Ravenwing pulled Blackpaw up by his scruff and corner his apprentice by a thick thorn bush. "You stupid kit! If you had been more quiet while stalking the under growth you could have won!" Ravenwing hissed.

Blackpaw looked at his mentor claws unsheathed and hissing. "I did

the undergrowth stalking just like you taught me! It's not my fault your a sorry excuse for a mentor," Blackpaw snarled stalking away though the under growth towards camp.

I snorted at the apprentices annoyance of me beating him. *Silentpaw will get a laugh out of this*.

"Lets do a quick hunt before we head back." Dawnsky suggested, waving her tail for me to follow her towards the ShadowClan border.

I nodded excitedly. For some reason, I wondered the chances of bumping into Thornpaw.

Probably not by much. I then let out a hiss. Why am I suddenly so eager to see a ShadowClan apprentice?

Walking through the growth, I kept my ears pricked and tongues out for signs of prey. Leaf-bare was nearly at its end and I was already ready to leave the drifts of snow behind.

"Okay, let's take it from here," Dawnsky meowed. I nodded. "Okay."

* * *

Giving my pelt a few licks, I watched as the sun brightly gleamed over the horizon as it began to sink over the hills. The sight was breathtaking to watch and I didn't get everyday to watch something beautiful so I sat in my nest—awoken from the sudden rays—and watched the sun set. Silentpaw was curled beside me, snoring softly.

After coming back from the hunting session, Dawnsky ordered me to take a rest since I would be heading to the gathering. And taking the rest was worth the while. My aching paws and sore muscles were now reduced and I could no longer feel it. Instead I felt energetic and excited.

I couldn't wait for the gathering. Silentpaw was snoozing beside me while Blackpaw was curled in the back. I snorted. Well, it's not like I care about him. I try not to bother myself with things that shouldn't concern me. At least for now.

Just the, Silentpaw stirred beside me and I quickly turn my head toward her. She raised her head slightly and blinked a few times. Shaking her head, she let out a yawn.

"Morning furball," I joked. Silentpaw suddenly tensed and scrambled to her paws so fast I let out a squeak of surprise and jolted away. I glared at Silentpaw but she didn't seemed to have noticed it.

"What—" I start but was cut off by Silentpaw's suddenly rambling. I flatten my ears. *Great starclan save me.*

"Is it morning? The—great starclan did I miss the Gathering?!" She gasped and stared at me with her aqua eyes. I blinked at her, dumbfounded. When I didn't answer, she swiped at my ears.

"Leafpaw!" she snapped.

"What?"

"What is wrong with you? Answer me?"

"Oh sorry, just trying to debate whether you're being dumb or not." I pause before continuing. "I'm coming to the conclusion you are being a complete idiotic mouse brain."

Silentpaw scowled at me. "Very funny," she muttered then plopped beside me. I rolled my eyes. She turned around and began licking her pelt, smoothing the fur sticking out.

"Who's going to the gathering?" Silentpaw asked between her licks. I frowned.

"Stoneheart and Embernose were asked to stay and guard the camp. Flowerheart decided to stay behind because she had some type of lung infection."

Silentpaw looked worried. "Oh no. Is she going to be okay?"

I shrugged. "I hope so. But with low herbs and prey, it might linger for a while. I'm not a medicine cat so I'm not sure."

Just before Silentpaw could respond, Ravenwing poked his head into the den. "Oh you're awake," he mutters. He then flicked his ear at us. "Well, come out. We're heading to the Gathering soon."

Silentpaw eyes flashed and she was soon out of her nest and bursting into the clearing. I got up from my nest and saw that Blackpaw was still snoring. I faced him and gave his ears a quick cuff. "Wake up," I hissed. "We're going to the gathering."

I then whipped around, not taking another glance, and slipped out of the den. Outside, the clan was restless. Everyone seemed to be on the edge and I was sure it was from the recent attack from the rouges. I walked to the clearing and saw Ivypaw sitting besides Parsleyseed. Suddenly interested, I made my way over to her.

"Hi," I mewed as I halted in front of her. Ivypaw jolted in surprise at the sound of my voice—her eyes widened slightly.

"Oh! Um, hi," she mewed awkwardly and threw me a wary glance.

"If you don't mind me asking," I start. "How is your apprentice training going so far?"

Ivypaw stared at me, surprised by the sudden question as she clearly did not expect it. Her eyes shot over Leafpaw's shoulder and from the corner of her eyes, she saw the black pelt of Blackpaw's.

I fought back a sneer when I saw his gaze make their way over to us. Focusing my attention back to Ivypaw who looked nervous, I cocked my head at her.

"Well?"

"It was okay, I guess," she mumbled and scuffed the dirt under her paws. Her gaze flickered a few times and I knew she felt intimidated by the presence of her brother and didn't want to share from the bottom of her heart. I scowled at her and shook my head.

Before I could say anything, she got up and slipped away leaving me staring after her. I turned around and let out a sigh.

"What's wrong?" Silentpaw asked, bounding up to me. I shrugged.

"Nothing."

Just then, Finchstar padded out of her den and leaped down to where the group of cats were grouping together.

"Cats of Skyclan!" she yowled, catching everyone's attention. "We will now be heading to the gathering. Let's go." She waved her thick, ginger tail signaling everyone to start moving. The two of us got up from where we were sitting and hurriedly made way to Dawnsky and Ravenwing and began walking out of the camp.

The Gathering took place in the edge of of Thunderclan, Skyclan, and Shadowclan territory—right before the Silverpelt River. At the edge there is a huge hill and atop laid a huge, beautiful tree where the leaders sat on the lowest branches while the deputies sat at the trunk. The tree was so huge that it made it a small shelter enough for all of the cats there occupying it. For Windclan and Riverclan to get to the other side of the river, they had to cross a fallen tree that made a bridge over the rushing water. The best part of the Gathering Hill was that the view of the Silverpelt River was the most beautifulest thing to ever see.

The moon reflects across the transparent, still water, shimmering.

We walked through the dense trees, heading closer and closer to river and then I heard it. The crashing noises of the water indicating that we were getting closer. The trees grew thinner and less denser.

And then—I saw it. The Gathering Hill was just as it was described. Atop on a hill with a huge tree sitting on the top. From the distance we were from, I could see the other clans climbing the steep hill that leads to the top.

Soon enough our clan was scrambling over the hills and made it to the top. Once we were at the top, I gasped at the sight.

"So many cats!" Silentpaw whispered beside me.

I nodded in agreement. Our clan walked through the long bladed of grasses and bushes that acted as a barrier around the edges of the hill.

Finchstar walked over to the tree and scrambled over the trunk and jumped over to the lowest branch—where the other leaders sat. Beside her, three other leaders sat commandingly and dragged their gaze over the clan cats. Mallowtail went over to the base of the tree and sat where other deputies were sitting. Parsleyseed and Ivypaw were sitting among the medicine cats and from where I was sitting, I could see Ivpaw eagerly talking to the other medicine cat apprentices.

Dawnsky who was beside me, gave me a slight nudge. "Come on, our clanmates are over there."

We headed over to where our clanmates were sitting and sat down where Silentpaw was looking arounf with wide eyes. I sat beside her and looked at the branch.

"Which leader is which?" I questioned. Dawnsky turned her gaze to where the leader sat.

"The black and white tom with red patches is Thistlestar. He's leader of Shadowclan. The dark gray tom is Ashstar, leader of Thunderclan. The light gray she-cat sitting beside Finchstar is Minnowstar, leader of Riverclan."

"Where is Windclan?" Silentpaw asked.

"They'll be here—they're just late," Dawnsky meowed. "Their leader is Thymestar. Everyone says that he is a calm and wise cat with a fair judgement. I think everyone respects him."

I stared at Dawnsky shocked. "Everyone? Like as in the other cats from other clans?"

Dawnsky merely shrugged. "I'm not sure, I just think it's true."

Just as Dawnsky was speaking, the bushes and brambles rustled alerting everyone's attention. A gray tom with a darker flank appeared from the thicket—who I assumed was Thymestar. Behind him was his deputy—a brown she-cat and his clan.

As they walked into the clearing, my eyes widened at how skinny they were. I shouldn't be surprised since Dawnsky told me that

Windclan cats are skinny since they eat rabbits and hares and live in an open moor but if I remember correctly, they should have muscles underneath their skin. Now, nothing but mere skin and bones cling to their pelt as they make their way over to where all the clan cats were sitting.

Thymestar made his way to where the leaders sat and sat between besides Finchstar. Then Thistlestar stepped forward and a yowl rang out.

"The Gathering will now begin!" He yowled and threw a glance toward . "Shadowclan will go first. Leaf-bare has been harsh but Shadowclan remains strong. Three new kits have been made into apprentice recently—Thornpaw, Nightpaw, and Smokepaw.

"Brindlestone has also given birth to two new kits—Maplekit and Aspenkit."

Shadowclan—who were right besides our clan—erupted into cheers, yowling out the three apprentices name. Pinethisle, the father of the kits, lifted his chin proudly at the mention of his newly born kits. I turn my head toward them and peer into the mists of cats, trying to get a view of the apprentices. I twisted my head a few times but to no avail so I reluctantly turned my head back as Thistlestar spoke once more.

"Recently, our patrols have been catching scents of rouges around the edges of the border though we never saw any. Patrols have been issued around the borders to catch any strays among them—Shadowclan will not prevail against rouges. We remain strong."

With that, Thistlestar sat back as Shadowclan let out ferocious yowls. As the cries died down. Ashstar stood up.

"As always, leaf-bare is harsh with scarce prey but Thunderclan does not falter. Two apprentices have been made into warriors—Cherryflare and Toadstrike."

The clearing then erupted into cheers yowling out the new warriors names. Cherryflare had her head raised proudly while Toadstrike gave his chest a few embarrassed licks. Ashstar looked satisfied and

sat back down.

Huh, he never mentioned the rouges, I thought. I couldn't help but feel curious—did Thunderclan ever come across the rouges? Maybe Ashstar didn't mention as it was probably a sign of weakness? I shrugged it off, not minding it since I knew nothing of it.

Minnowstar then rose up and began reporting on how little prey there were that the clan had to rely on birds and mice.

"Two new apprentices have been made—Icepaw and Flowerpaw," she added, a hint of pride lingering in her voice. The clearing once more chanted the names while Icepaw and Flowerpaw's parents—Lilacheart and Crowhiss—watched them, side by side, proudly.

"Tinystep is pregnant with Timbershade's kits and will spend her time in the nursery until her kits are born." Riverclan cheered happily while Minnowstar flicked her tail smugly and sat down. Finchstar rose silently and waited for the clearing to die down.

I then realized that she was going to call out our names. I shifted nervously and unsheathed my claws, digging them to the ground. Silentpaw was wriggling beside me from excitement.

"Like every other clans, leaf-bare has been a struggle with low prey. However Skyclan was been thriving and strong as ever as we have two new warriors to add to our ranks. Honeywisp and Swiftleap!"

Lifting my chin into the air, I began chanting the two warriors names. Finchstar continued once the cheers died down once again.

"We also have four new apprentices. Silentpaw, Leafpaw, Blackpaw, and Ivypaw have all been made apprentice. Ivypaw had taken apprenticeship under Parsleyseed as she wished to take the path of a medicine cat."

Skyclan was the first to chant our names along with other few clan cats. Gazes and eyes turned toward us; I gave my chest a couple of licks and avoided the stares by holding my chin high. Silentpaw did the same while Blackpaw looked around with bored eyes. Ivypaw looked at her paws shyly while the other medicine cats happily

chanted her name.

Finchstar continued her report and much to my surprise, it was about the rouge attacks.

"Our patrols have also caught rouge scents along our borders. We have met their force a few times but we managed to keep them out of our territory," Finchstar said with a satisfied lash of her tail.

Thymestar, who was crouching besides Finchstar, rose slowly and gave her a curious glance. He then began his report mentioning low prey, two new kits being born—Harekit and Softkit—and two new apprentices named Gingerpaw and Squirrelpaw—who was also taking apprenticeship under a medicine cat.

Leaning over to Silentpaw, I whispered. "So many new apprentices." Silentpaw gave a slow nod before her eyes lit up slightly. "Means we can make more friends!"

I let out a small *mrrow* of laughter and turned back around to face the leaders only to find that the clan cats were mingling amongst each other.

"You guys may go speak with the other apprentices," Dawnsky suddenly said making me whip my head over to her. "Really?" I asked.

Dawnsky purred. "Yep. The leaders are done making their reports so you're allowed to talk with other cats."

"Yes!" Silentpaw jumped to her paws. Dawnsky's whiskers twitched with amusement. Rolling my eyes, I got up from my spot and hurried after Silentpaw who was streaking over to the other clans. I witted my paws to move faster as Silentpaw as now basically running however I became distracted and soon lost sight of Silentpaw's dark pelt among the midst of cats.

"Great," I grumbled. "Silentpaw, you had one job to do and that was to stay by my side." I was about to head back over to where Skyclan was when a sudden familiar voice made me stop in my tracks.

"Leafpaw, is it?"

Turning around so fast, I nearly stumbled and tripped but I managed to catch myself at the last moment. I was then met with the same yellow eyes I saw before. I tipped my head to one side.

"Thornpaw, is it?" I joked. Thornpaw twitched his whiskers.

"If you say so," he said unbothered. I scoffed at him. Thornpaw sat down and licked his paw before bringing it over his ear. "If you're concerned if I told anyone about incident, you don't have to be."

"Can you be a little louder?" I muttered. "I don't think your clan mates heard you."

Thornpaw paused from his cleaning and stared at me, a glint of amusement in his eyes. He shook his head. "Are you testing me?"

"No," I meowed and stared at him smugly. "You just said you won't tell on me."

Thornpaw opened his mouth to say something when Thymestar's sudden meow silenced the cats below him.

"Finchstar," he bellowed catching the ginger's attention. He stared at her for a moment before continuing. "What exactly do you mean when you said that you found rouges on your territory?" Finchstar bristled slightly at his words.

"What do you mean?"

"Were they at the edge of your borders, just lingering there. Or are they more of a nuisance," he prompted. Finchstar scoffed. "Certainly not a nuisance."

Thymestar narrowed his eyes and turned to the clearing. "I want to warn everyone," he rasped. "That do not be fooled by these rouges. Do not underestimate them." He turned to Thistlestar.

"You said your clan smelled rouge scent on your border?"

Thistlestar fluffed his fur out and narrowed his eyes at the Winclan leader. "Why are you concerned by other clans problems?"

Thymestar ignored his question. "These rouges are not what they seem!" He yowled. "I suggest you leaders to wary your decisions when it comes to rouges. Or you will pay dearly."

And then Thymestar flicked his tail, signaling Windclan to leave. He jumped down and walked out of the clearing with his clan clambering behind him.

I turned to Thornpaw. "Go to go, bye," I whispered and flicked my tail at him before rushing over to my clanmates.

The gathering was over.

Allegiance — Part Two

SkyClan

LEADER: Finchstar - ginger she-cat with green eyes

DEPUTY: Mallowtail - pale ginger tom with white flecks along the pelt
Apprentice, Silentpaw (red molly with lighter reddish orange legs & tails with folded ears)

MEDECINE CAT: Parsleyseed - white tom with brown patches
Apprentice, Ivypaw (black and silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes)

WARRIORS:

Cloudfur - white tom with a graying muzzle and amber eyes

Stoneheart - gray tabby tom with light blue eyes

Embernose - black tom with blue eyes

Leapflight - light brown she-cat with strong hind legs

Mouseclaw - dark brown tom with light brown stripes and hazel eyes

Willownose - brown tabby she-cat with green-blue eyes

Petalshade - silver she-cat with sky blue eyes

Ravenwing - sleek black tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Blackpaw (black tom with long matted fur)

Snowpebble - gray tom with white paws and tail with light brown eyes

Dawnsky - black and white tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes

Apprentice, Leafpaw (dark reddish tabby she-cat with green-blue eyes)

Swiftleap - lean, muscular black tom with white paws and underbelly

Honeywisp - pale ginger she-cat with light brown eyes

QUEENS:

ELDERS:

Foxwhisker - dark red tom with hazel eyes

Flowerheart - white she-cat with a black tail and dark amber eyes

Flakenose - gray and white tabby she-cat with swirl patterns and blue eyes

Shadowclan

LEADER: Thistlestar - black and white tom with red patches

DEPUTY: Rosewillow - cream brown she-cat with a bushy tail

MEDICINE CAT: Beestripe - white she-cat with yellow stripes and hazel eyes

WARRIORS:

Lilywhisper - silver and black tortoiseshell she-cat with light green eyes

Talonclaw - Brown tom with scars over his pelt

Puddlespot - brown and white tom
Apprentice, Lakepaw (gray tabby she-cat with black flecks)

Silvermist - silver she-cat with dark gray patches and bright green eyes

Icestorm - white she-cat with a black chest and a bushy tail
Apprentice, Smokepaw (light brown tabby she-cat with lighter

stripes and blue eyes)

Pinethistle - stocky brown tom with darker brown legs
Apprentice, Thornpaw (large, dark brown tom with lighter stripes and matted fur)

Oakstep - black tom with a short tail and thick fur around his neck
Apprentice, Nightpaw (dark gray molly with ash blue eyes)

Sedgecreek - Dappled golden with black ears tabby she cat and flecked green eyes

Stormsight - dark gray tom with white legs and green eyes
Apprentice, Shadepaw (black tom with white underbelly and legs)

QUEENS:

Brindlestone - soft furred, light grey tabby she-cat with brown eyes (mother of Pinethistle kits: Maplekit, brown she-kit with lighter brindle stripes; Aspenkit, tortoiseshell tom with light yellow eyes)

ELDERS:

Tansyleg - white tom with golden patches and green eyes

Patchfur - brown tom with grey ears and paws

Tawneyflick - ginger and black she-cat with yellow eyes

ThunderClan

LEADER: Ashstar - dark grey tom with stocky legs and dark green eyes

DEPUTY: Flashleap - tortoiseshell tom with brown spots and hazel eyes

MEDICINE CAT: Hazelberry - dark brown she-cat with a lighter underbelly and yellow eyes
Apprentice, Mistpaw (grey tom with long legs and white paws and muzzle)

WARRIORS:

Creekpool - golden dappled she-cat with hazel eyes

Brookwater - dappled gray she-cat

Bumblenose - ginger tom with white legs and amber eyes

Wolftalon - long furred, grey tom with blue eyes

Sandstep - cream tabby she-cat with white paws and underbelly and dark brown eyes

Littlefoot - small black tom with a stump for a tail

Palestripe - very light brown she-cat with swirls and dark blue eyes

Scorchsun - dark tom with a faded tail and white muzzle

Toadstrike - gray tom with emerald green eyes

Cherryflare - pale ginger and white she-cat with darker ginger stripes

QUEENS:

Sunnyshine - bright ginger tabby she-cat (mother of Wolftalon kits: Snakekit, a bright ginger she-kit with a white muzzle; Breezekit, dark grey tom; Rowankit, white tom with ginger patches)

ELDERS:

Yellowheart - yellow tom

Shadenose - a dark grey tabby she-cat with one eye

Lizardstripe - brown tom with a gray muzzle with nearly deaf ears

RiverClan

LEADER: Minnowstar - light gray she-cat with darker gray paws and underbelly with green eyes

DEPUTY: Ottervine - dusky brown tom and yellow eyes

MEDICINE CAT: Badgerheart - white and black tom with amber eyes

WARRIORS:

Riversight - blueish gray she-cat with blue green eyes
Apprentice, Icepaw(jet black tom with white paws and green eyes)

Aspenfall - white tom with a grayish black tail and amber eyes
Apprentice, Flowerpaw(white she-cat with black patches and light blue eyes)

Mistyflower - white and black tortoiseshell she-cat with a gray muzzle and amber eyes

Timbershade - black tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Foxpaw (ginger she-cat with green eyes)

Berryhaze - ginger tom with white paws and under belly with amber eyes

Crowhiss - jet black tom with light blue eyes

Lilacheart - white she-cat with green eyes

Pondleap - Brown she-cat with darker brown stripes on her legs and yellow eyes
Apprentice, Echopaw (grayish white tom with blue eyes)

Reednose - grayish blue tom with blue eyes

QUEENS:

Tinystep - golden she-cat with white stripes along her flank and dashing green eyes (expecting Timbershade kits)

ELDERS:

Sparrowfang - cranky old tom with a light gray pelt and yellow eyes

Speckledclaw - Dusky brown she-cat with amber eyes

Ambersky - ginger she-cat with amber eyes

WindClan

LEADER: Thymestar - Gray tom with Darker gray flank and green eyes

DEPUTY: Havenfern - Brown she-cat with darker brown stripes and yellow eyes

MEDICINE CAT: Marigoldleaf - golden she-cat with sky blue eyes
Apprentice, Squirrelpaw (ginger she-cat with dark ginger stripes and amber eyes)

WARRIORS:

Ferngaze - pale grey she-cat with darker stripes and smooth pads
Apprentice, Kestrelpaw (black tom with gray paws and spots and brown eyes)

Ashcloud - gray tom with dark gray flank and blue eyes

Rabbitfoot - Brown tom with darker brown spots on his flank with yellow eyes

Ivywillow - Brown she-cat with white paws and amber eyes
Apprentice, Gingerpaw (ginger and white tom with blue eyes)

Duskstream - tortoiseshell and white she- cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Valleypaw (light brown she-cat with amber eyes)

Lichensplash - Black tom with brown eyes

Featherfern - white she-cat with dark gray stripes and honey-brown eyes

Eagletail - Ginger tom with amber eyes

Mintleaf - white she-cat with blue eyes

QUEENS:

Frostbite - Whitish gray she-cat with dark gray flecks and green eyes (mother of Ashclouds kits: Softkit; light gray she cat with paler stripes and dashing blue eyes; Harekit; white tom with gray patches and gray tail with green eyes)

ELDERS:

Windheart - old Black tom with a gray muzzle and blue eyes

MossStep - old tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes

Rouges

LEADER: Ezekiel - dark ginger tom with long matted fur and scars covering his flank and yellow eyes

DEPUTIES: Fang - black tom with white stripes and hazel eyes

Foxscar - black tom with darker gray stripes and a huge scar running from her eyes to his flank with yellow eyes

MEMBERS:

Scarlett - black long furred molly with long claws and usual red eyes

Apple - Reddish brown she-cat with dark yellow eyes

Coal - Black tom with shredded ears and light blue eyes

Ranger - dappled grey tom with aqua green eyes

Moon - Silver she cat with black legs and very light green eyes (sister: midnight)

Midnight - Silver and black molly with dark blue eyes

Flint - ginger and black tom with a torn ear and white tail tip

Prickle - a light grey spikey furred she-cat with blue eyes

Half-face - a bulky, muscular light brown tom with half of its face torn and shredded

Snowflake - white tabby she-cat with green eyes with grey spots flecking her pelt

Flick - mottled dark brown tom with light brown paws and yellow eyes

Matt - light brown tom with dark striped legs and amber eyes

Beetle - gray tom with stump for a tail

Hope - white tabby she-cat with tortoiseshell and ginger patches

Freckles - orange and white she-cat with freckles across the muzzle

Toad - brown tom with slick, smooth fur and light brown paws with sky blue eyes

Pepper - a long-furred lilac tortoiseshell tabby she-cat

Ebony - a medium curly-furred cinnamon tortoiseshell tom with white tipped tail with amber eyes

Hawk - white calico she-cat with black and gold markings with fluffy fur and forest green eyes

Bee - black she-cat with a bob tail and light blue eyes

SHE-CAT WITH KIT(S):

Clove - pale gray-white she-cat with light stripes with a limp

11 | view

2/19

H A W K

I hissed as Flick applied poultices to the wound on my shoulder, our wounds from the fight with the clan cats were messy but we managed to escape SkyClan territory with half of our pelts still on.

Things haven't been good for me after that battle, the wound I got on my shoulder from that warrior in training, Silentpaw I think, got infected and Flick said I need to stay in camp until its better. When we returned to camp Ezekiel was furious at Flint for retreating and leaving me, Bee, and Fang behind to deal with the clan cats. You would think Flint was a new born kit if you saw how helpless and scared he looked as Ezekiel scolded him.

Fangs injuries weren't deep neither was Bees but Flick advised us to stay in camp until all of our wounds have healed completely. "There you go Hawk." Mewed Flick turning back to his small herb store hidden in the brambles, the mottled dark brown tom flicked his tail in frustration at the sight of his low herb store.

"Maybe since I can't hunt or fight I could help you gather some herbs?" I asked but got a stern look from the toms yellow gaze. "Ezekiel would never allow it! Your brother would claw off my pelt if he saw you working with me." Flick hissed, the tom looked scared and shocked that I even suggested I help him.

Also yes, you heard him right, Ezekiel is my brother. Older brother. Ezekiel was the only surviving kit of our mothers first litter while I was the only surviving kit of her second. And when Ezekiel named himself the leader of our rouge clan no cat even looked at me crossly.

Our mother, rabbit, had died not long after my birth. She was taken down by a band of no-fur kits, they beat her to death while she was

looking for prey and Ezekiel watched from the bushes as they threw her in the river. My brother has never been the same since.

After rabbits death Bees mother, Apple, raised me and fed me. Our rouge clan used to be just a band of cats in a no-fur abandoned building but now we lived on the side of the mountain range just above the clans.

We move everything few days to spy and attack defenseless clan cats. SkyClan was a big target, I don't know why but Foxscar was the cat who told Ezekiel about the clans and SkyClan was always a target I guess.

I flattened my ears and stalked away from Flicks corner of our small clearing where we set up camp. We don't have dens so we sleep wherever we want the only ones who do have a spot in the clearing is Ezekiel, Fang, Clove, and Flick.

Fang is Ezekiel's deputy so they sleep by one another, while Clove has her own spot so her kit won't get in any cats paws. And lastly Flick has his own spot so he can take care of our injured.

I shook my pelt and nodded towards Pepper, Ebony, and Clove who were huddled together on the other side of the clearing watching Forrest play with a leaf. The 4 cats had recently joined our band of rouges, they were all kittypets collars and all but Ezekiel still let them join.

They would be useful if they knew how to hunt. Pepper always tripped over her own tail, I often watched the long furred lilac tortoiseshell tabby struggle to maintain balanced and calm. Ebony is not better, the curly-furred cinnamon tortoiseshell tom would scare the prey away before he got within 10 no-fur legs of it.

The one time the tom was able to get close to the prey to almost catch it he scared it off by twitching his white tipped tail from side to side in excitement. Lastly Clove, the pale gray-white she-cat showed up here with a injury and now has a permanent limp, she was no help for hunting.

A part of me felt bad for these kittypets, they were born along side

no-furs in their dens and never needed to learn how to hunt and fight. I envied them for their relaxed and well fed life while we are out here starving and fighting to survive.

But I would never admit my sympathy for them, if I were to my ears would get raked by Ezekiel.

I scraped my claws against the snow, staying here with so many cats was overwhelming I need to get out of camp for awhile. I looked around the clearing and watched Ezekiel and Fang push their way through the bushes to talk in private but not long after Foxscar joined them.

Moon, Midnight, and Hope crouched together talking in hushed voices over a shared rabbit while Pepper, Ebony, Clove, and Forrest continued to lounge around.

before any cat could take notice of me I slipped though the clearings side and trotted towards the edge of Clan cat territory. I sniffed at their scent markers and the familiar stench of SkyClan filled my nose and made me gag. *Do all the clan cats smell this foul!?!* I wondered.

I crawled across the scent line and stopped dead in my tracks at the familiar cat scent. Sniffing closely I recognized Silentpaws scent also 1 or the two warriors that there with Silentpaw when we fought.

Silent as a mouse I crawled though some under growth and followed Silentpaws scent more slowly, before long the under growth came to a stop and I peered through the last of the under growth to see 5 cats in a small clearing.

The patrol included Silentpaw and the pale ginger tom that was apart of the patrol we attacked. With them were 3 cats unknown to me.

"I'm telling the truth!" Hissed a small black tom with a matted pelt who looked to be younger then Silentpaw. "There was rouge scent here, I smelt it with my own nose!" The small tom finished and began moving his head from side to side as if waiting for something to jump out of the under growth and hurt them.

My claws dug into the moist ground from the melting snow. *We have not been in clan territory since my fight!?! This good for nothing mouse brain can't tell the difference between his own clanmates scents and ours!*

I was lost in thought of jumping out of the under growth and teaching the kit a lesson when a familiar voice spoke up. "Suck it up Blackpaw, no rouge has been on our territory since they attacked me, Leafpaw, Mallowtail, and Dawnsky. No cat is here, you've got got bees in your brain." Hissed Silentpaw with a slash of her bushy tail.

Blackpaw looked like he was about to jump at Silentpaw when a black tom with white paws and underbelly stepped in. "Blackpaw, maybe you scented wrong?" The tom suggested while the pale ginger tom followed. "Yes, like Silentpaw said there have been no rouge on our territory and there is no scent of rouges here." The tom paused and sniffed the air.

Quickly I made sure I was downwind before continuing to listen to the cats argument. "No rouge smell here, now stop with the chatter and lets get a move on." The pale tom said barging through the under growth.

The other cats followed but just as Silentpaw was about to jump out of the clearing I made myself heard. "Hey!" I called without thinking and instantly shut my mouth. *Oh Hawk what did you just do!?!*

Silentpaw whipped around and her gaze stretched across the whole clearing. "Whos there!?!" She hissed her fur standing on edge. "Don't be a coward I heard you! Come out!" Silentpaw hissed opening her jaws to sniff the air.

I quietly I slipped though the under growth into the clearing and faced Silentpaw. I expected her hostility to strengthen but instead it softened while her eyes remained narrowed. "You! What are you doing here?!" The she-cat asked with a hiss.

I gulped before replying. "I don't want to fight, I just thought you should know that none of us rouges have been on SkyClan territory

since the fight we had with your patrol." I mewed sternly. "The black tom is lying."

Silentpaws hostility vanished and she tilted her head at me. "Why are you telling me? Don't you rouges want this? The battle, the blood, the death?" She asked.

"You may think we want this but some of us would rather not be in war with the 5 clans of the mountain range." I finished sternly and was about to leave when Silentpaw spoke, her tone was rather soft. "Well, thank you. But you know I can't fully believe you." Silentpaw mewed in a amused tone.

I let out a soft mew of laughter before relying. "I know, you clan cats have trust issues but you Don't need to worry about me." I finished and was about to leave when Silentpaw spoke again.

"What's your name again?"

"Hawk."

"Well, hope to see you soon, Hawk."

S I L E N T

The wet grass felt good on my paw pads as I stalked though the under growth towards The SilverPelt River. Me and Leafpaw both got places to hunt and try to catch as much fresh kill as we could before sun high, but this time we were also playing with Blackpaw.

My mind was keen on making Blackpaw come in last and I could tell as was Leafpaws.

Well, maybe mine was not entirely focused on just the challenge. The conversation I had with the rouge she-cat Hawk stayed in my mind all the time.

No matter how much I tried to couldn't figure out why Hawk had told me about Blackpaws bluff with the rouges coming in our territory. Or why Blackpaw would lie about that in the first place.

I shook my head to clear my thoughts, *focus on this Silentpaw, you*

must beat Blackpaw.

I continued my way though the under growth until I reached SkyClans stretch of The SilverPelt River. Opening my jaws I scented the smell of vole, my gaze followed the smell until I saw a fat vole munching on a yellow looking herb.

I crouched, checked to make sure I was downwind, and stalked towards the vole. Its smell over came me, I hadn't seen any prey so fat in many moons. Just as I was getting closer I estimated the jump and leaped with my claws extended.

The vole let out a squeak of surprise and tried to make a run for it but I was to quick and pinned the vole beneath my paws before killing it with a swift bite at the neck.

I purred at my catch before burying it in some dry leaves and picking up the scent of a rabbit.

* * *

I trotted back towards Mallowtail and the others in confident strides, I carried a vole by their tails in my jaws with a long and fat rabbit slung over my back.

I dropped my catches at Mallowtails paws and the deputy purred loudly. "well done Silentpaw." The tom praised flicking my folded ear with his tail. Sadly my moment was ruined by a snort from Blackpaw. "I'm surprised you can catch anything with those limp ears of yours." The apprentice teased and raised his voice. "Can you hear me now Loudpaw!!" The black tom almost yowled but was shut down as Dawnsky and Leafpaw patted into the clearing.

Leafpaws eyes shone as all the warriors admired the squirrel and crow she caught, I trotted up to my sister and flicked her ear. "good catch! The elders and medicine cat have been craving squirrels, come on lets bring our catches back to camp."

Our whole patrol pushed through the thorn barrier to see the whole clan was gathered in the clearing their eyes shone at the sight of our fresh kill.

Me and Leafpaw both took a squirrel and brought them to the elders and med cats. I pushed though the the entrance of the med den to find Ivypaw and Parsleyseed organizing herbs but they both turned at the smell of my squirrel.

"Fresh from my hunt." I mewed dropping the squirrel in the middle of the den, Ivypaw licked her lips and Parsleyseed gave me a nod of thanks before I left the med den to find Leafpaw.

I picked up a vole from the fresh kill and trotted towards my sister who was laid out besides the apprentice den a thrush in her paws.

Joy was filling my pelt and I didn't know if it was from beating Blackpaw or the thought of Hawk, even when I was hunting the she-cat never left my mind. I laid down besides Leafpaw and started eating when I caught Leafpaw looking at me with curious eyes.

"What's up?" I asked ripping off the flesh of my prey to eat. Leafpaw stared at me for a few more seconds before relying while stuffing her face with her thrush. "You have just seemed full of joy the past few days, like stuff that you usually don't like doing you do without a second thought." I took my jaws away from my vole before replying.

"Just have had a better view of things, a more calm and beautiful view." I answered but before Leafpaw could ask me what I meant I grabbed my vole and trotted over to Mallowtail across the clearing.

12 | shattered

TW: Detailed fighting, gore, and blood

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2/28

L E A F

Things were starting to get odd. For example, Silentpaw seemed more distant lately. She seemed more merrier than usual and when I asked her why she simply shrugged and said it was her training and hunting.

I was lying outside the apprentice den feeling hazy with my thoughts. Just then, I watched as Silentpaw bounded over where Mallowtail was sitting unde the High Rock. Cats gathered around him as he gave orders for hunting and border patrols. I hoped for Silentpaw to come over to where I was, but she stayed where she was.

Disappointment blurred through me. I always thought we shared a close bond but for some reason, I felt that I was overreacting but I knew that Silentpaw was hiding something. I just knew it.

Guess it's a sister thing. Whatever the reason is, I wasn't going to ask. I didn't want to push her and demand for something I have no proof of. So for now, I'll just let it be. Stretching from my spot, I got up and headed over to Dawnsky.

The tortoiseshell was finishing a shrew and looked up when she heard someone approaching. "Are we doing something today?" I asked, settling down and wrapping my tail around my paw. Dawnsky nodded.

"Yes, we're going to do tree hunting around the Shadowclan," she mewed. She paused for a moment before adding. "New-leaf is coming up so more prey might be available."

"Oh okay," I said. Dawnsky finished her shrew then cleaned her whiskers with quick rhythmic strokes. I waited patiently, hoping to go out as soon as possible.

"Leafpaw!"

My ears perked up and I turned around at the sound of my name and saw Mouseclaw sitting besides Willownose. The two were sharing a thrush. Willownose waved her tail, signaling for me to come over. I threw a quick glance to Dawnsky, who gave me a nod, before hurrying over to them. Willownose purred when I came over to her.

She leaned forward and gave my ears a quick lick. "How are you?" She asked as she leaned back. I let out a purr.

"I'm doing great!"

"How's training?" Mouseclaw prompt.

"Difficult at some points. But it always comes around," I admit. "It's fun to learn new things."

Willownose snorted at me. "Like cleaning the nests and elders fur?"

My fur suddenly fluffed out and I glare at her in shock. "No! Not that!" I shook my head, my whiskers twitching. Willownose let out a *mrrow* of laughter. "Well, we all had to do it."

"That, I think the whole forrest knows," I mutter. She got up and flicked my ear.

"I have to head out for a border patrol," she mewed. "We'll talk more later, alright?"

I raised my head and blinked at her. A purr rumbled in my throat, happiness spiking through me. I've never been gladder to have Willownose as my mom. She's always there when I need her and I knew that no matter what, I could always rely on her. Willownose touched noses with Mouseclaw then bounded over to Mallowtail and Silentpaw who were now waiting besides the camp entrance.

Mouseclaw watched his mate leave—I turned to him, suddenly curious as a thought burned through me. "Mouseclaw?"

He looked down at me. "Yes?"

I looked down, pondering whether I should ask or not. Deciding to take the shot, I ask. "How much do you love Willownose?"

He stared at me, his eyes glimmering. He bent down and rested his muzzle on top of my head as he said the next sentence.

"So much," he murmured. "You're mother means the world to me."

"Really?"

"Yes."

I ducked out of Mouseclaw's grip and purred at him. "I'm glad!" I then waved my tail at Mouseclaw who had gotten up, then bounded over to Dawnsky and Petalshade, where they were both patiently waiting for me. I walked up to Dawnsky.

"Ready?" She asked. I nodded. Dawnsky turned around and pushed her way into the camp entrance leading outside.

We swerved through the brambles and trees that are glistening from the melting snow. The soil beneath our paws were wet and soggy—spring was coming. The forrest, which was previously quiet, was now slowly beginning to awaken. Birds chirped, squirrels chittered, woodpeckers pecked. It seemed much more lively and I liked it.

We walked for a while until Dawnsky halted. My paws skidded on the slippery floor as I stopped myself beside the black tortoiseshell she-cat. "Do you hear that?" Dawnsky asked, her ears twitching. I looked at the tortoiseshell before straining my ears. A slight sound was caught and my ear twitched from the sound.

"The stream!" I exclaimed. Dawnsky nodded. Petalshade padded beside her, her ears perked up as she listened to the rushing water nearby.

"I suppose the warmth is melting the ice," she mewed. "The river

will be a hot mess soon."

"In that case, it's best to stay away from that." Dawnsky let out a snort. "Not like we have fins and gills to help us if we fall in."

Dawnsky turned around and led us deeper into the forrest. Deep enough where the trees grew taller and taller. Once she was far enough, she halted and faced me. Petalshade flicked her ear at Dawnsky and told us she'll hunt on her own then disappeared into the thicket.

"Right, now I hope you didn't forget your tree climbing lessons," Dawnsky meowed as she walked over to a trees.

"Of course not," I retorted. I walked over to the tree Dawnsky was standing besides. Unsheathing my claws, I reared onto my hind legs and rested my fore paws on the trunk. I felt the trunk under my paw and examined a spot to hook my claws in. A small hedge was cracked into the trunk side, so using it I rested my hind leg on it and hoisted myself onto the tree.

The hard part of climbing was finding space to hook your claws into because without it, hauling yourself up would be tricky.

Gripping the trunk, I began hoisting myself higher and higher up until I managed to climb up onto a branch. Dawnsky who was right behind me, scrambled beside me. When she saw my fluffed out tail and me panting, she let an amused purr. I let out a huff.

Dawnsky eyes flashed and within a moment she was up onto the trunk and scrambling over the branches. I wasted no time hurrying after her, scrambling over the trunk and gracefully leaping onto the branches. I gripped the branch underneath me, my ears flattened slightly as the wind whooshed by me, ruffling my fur. I looked around, hoping to catch a glimpse of a black tortoiseshell within the tree but to no avail.

I huffed and sat down, knowing that Dawnsky would come over to me sooner or later. Just then, the branch jerked slightly, allowing wisps of snow to smoothly fall to the ground. Dawnsky slowly made her way over to me.

"Well, that was fun wasn't it?" She asked as she stopped a fox tail length away from me. I nodded. "Yep! It was."

"Good. Now we'll do some real training," she said.

"Yes!" I hissed. I rose from my spot and gave Dawnsky an excited glance "Finally some tree hunting tricks! Everyone in the clan says you're an expert when it comes to tree climbing and actually came up with a few techniques."

Dawnsky bent down and gave her chest a few licks. "Well, they're not wrong," she mumbled. Raising her head, she examined the area around us. Another sharp wind blew past us and I thought about this later on, whether the wind was the reason why we heard anything.

But as soon as the wind went by us, I heard a screech. At first, it seemed so distant and hollow, I was wondering whether I was hallucinating. I twitched my ear and became oddly still—my fur fluffed out, my tail straight and pointed, my claws unsheathed. The only thing that could be hear was the small creaks of the branch as it swayed from the wind. It had suddenly became eerie quiet, so quiet that it sent a shiver down my spine.

"Did you just hear that?" Dawnsky suddenly meowed making me flinch slightly. I opened my mouth but hesitated to answer because I really didn't know. Just then, another yowl followed.

I gasped. "Is it Petalshade?"

Dawnsky shook her head. "No, it sounded like a tom's voice and more further away." She paused and looked out into the vast open then turned back towards me. "Let's head down."

I nodded and gently leaped over to the next closest branch. Dawnsky warned me to be careful since the wet snow made it slippery. Once the two of us were back on the ground, we followed Petalshade's scent and much to our luck we bumped right into her.

"Thank Starclan," the silver molly rasped. She knelt down and dropped whatever prey she was holding.

"Did you hear that?" Dawnsky asked to the she-cat. Petalshade nodded.

"Sounded like fighting," she mewed. My eyes widened as a single thought struck me.

"Rouges?" I blurted out. I turned to Dawnsky who looked grim.

"Seems so," she replied. Flicking her ear, she motioned toward the direction where the screeching came from. "We should head over there and see if we can assist help."

Dawnsky whirled around, her fur fluffed out where she looked like a porcupine. She ran through the forest with Petalshade and me right behind her heels. As we swiftly pelted through the trees and slippery ground, thoughts whirled inside of my head leaving me breathless. My prior memories of fighting with the rouges cats played through my mind as my paws slammed on the floor.

What do they even want? I thought desperately. *I thought fighting them previously would set them right but it seemed to only make thing worse.*

As we crashed through the brambles, I realized that we were heading closer toward the Shadowclan border. And as we got closer, the sudden noises and scent overwhelmed me leaving me gasping and blurring my vision. Shaking my head, I blinked and shoved the thoughts out of my head.

I couldn't falter now. My clan needed me. I couldn't be a weak and pathetic. Not right now, at least.

The more closer we got, the more stronger the scent of rouges had gotten. But not only rouges but Skyclan and Shadowclan too. And it seemed like the battle was a full scale ambush.

"Hurry!" Dawsky hissed. "It sounds bad!"

I forced my legs to move faster and faster until the three of us bursted out from the thicket and hurled ourselves straight into the screeching cats.

My legs willed me to stop and anticipate and observe the battle but I was running so fast that I flashed right past Dawnsky and Petalshade and slammed into a random cat. A yowl tore my throat as the two of collided and was knocked into the dirt. My head smacked onto the ground, throwing my senses all over the place. My head ached and my gazed blurred as I struggled to regain my breath.

All while I was struggling to get onto my footing, the tom that I crashed onto, swamped over me and pinned me down. As soon as I felt this, panic settled over me.

Mouse-brain, I scolded myself. *Look at what you got yourself into!*

Growling, I twisted my lower body and tried to swipe my hind leg at the toms belly but I wasn't able to reach it which then earned a powerful blow to my shoulder. I let out a screech of pain—claws tore into my flank as I furiously and repeatedly slashed my hind legs at them.

I gasped as I felt another blow to my shoulder.

Think, Leafpaw! Think! I wailed mentally. I then stopped myself as I realized I wouldn't be getting anywhere if I let panic consume me. I calmed myself down, urging the body to relax as my mind was suddenly surrounded by the lessons I was previously taught.

I let my body go limp under the tom's grip then flattened my ears and tucked my tail—a way to show surrender and defeat. Just as I expected, the tom's grip on me loosened and at that moment, I contracted my muscles before surging upward and throwing the tom back.

He let out a shocked yowl as my paws gripped his face and slammed him into the dirt. I grabbed him by the flank and yanked him to the side, throwing him completely off balance. His paws scrabbled furiously but I wasted no time leaping onto his back and leaving a bunch of painful scratches along his side. The tom bucked under me and threw me aside, yowling, then running off into the distance.

Grunting, I sat up and looked around. In the distance, cats were locked in a deadly combat.

I saw Dawnsky and Petalshade fighting three rouges off side by side. Further on, I saw Mallowtail leaping forward and pinning a light brown tom on the ground while Silentpaw darted to and fro swiping at his ears. Willownose was on her hind legs, her ears drawn back as she swiftly ducked under a rouges leap before whirling around and throwing herself on top of them. Besides them was a group of Shadowclan warriors fighting off hoards of rouges.

There's too many of them! I thought. I scrambled to my foot and turned to the rouges who was swiping ferociously at Dawnsky. Petalshade let out a scream as a white taby jumped on her and tore her pelt. Growling, I ran over to the rouge and leaped onto her back.

"Get off her!" I snarled and ripped my claws into her cheek. Blood welled under my claws and seeped into my fur as I gripped the white she-cat. I grabbed her shoulders and hauled her off of Petalshade.

The rouge snarled at me and swiped at my ear leaving a slash. I let out a hiss of pain and threw myself at the cat. The weight threw her back and allowed me to pin her down and add heavy blows to her belly and shoulder. The white rouge cried out in pain and struggled to get out of my grip.

"Leave!" I spat and jumped away, allowing the she-cat to scramble to her paws and disappear into the battle. I turned around and saw Petalshade—who's now back on her paws—and Dawnsky chasing the other two rouges away. Panting, Dawnsky turned toward me and gave a nod.

"Good work," she meowed, her breath coming out in gasps. "Let's go help the others."

I nodded at Dawnsky and quickly sped over to where the Skyclan and Shadowclan patrols were struggling to fight the rouges off.

I let out a yowl and launched myself at a black she-cat. The rouge

yelped as my weight crashed upon them leaving them flattened and stunned. Using the opportunity, I slashed at the black she-cat's ears and tugged my hind legs on their shoulder. However, out of her stun, threw me off with a powerful jab. I was flung over to the side and gasped as my breath was knocked out of my chest.

I coughed and quickly sat up, watching as the rouge advanced at me. Only, they stopped.

"You!" She suddenly cried. I snapped my head up and stared at the rouge, my mind clouding with question. My eyes then widened as the she-cat suddenly became more familiar.

Bee! I thought. *The same cat I previously fought before. And left me with an ugly wound.*

I narrowed my eyes at her and got up. "Nice reunion I suppose," I mewed.

Bee snarled at me. "Very." Her light blue eyes sparked with rage as she stared at me. All filled with nothing but intense hate. And yet, she was barely older than me.

Bee took the first move. She lunged at me though her eyes betrayed her move.

She's aiming for my back, I told myself. In that case—

I reared back onto my hind legs and slammed my paw into Bee's face throwing her off balance. She crashed onto the side but quickly regained her footing. Hissing, she crouched and leaped—lowly—and managed to hook her paw onto my shoulder and push me to the side. I let out a hiss of pain as I let claws tear onto my ears drawing warm blood down my face. I twisted my lower body so that I was able to slam my hind paw into her stomach and throw her backwards.

"Nice one, clan cat," Bee sneered. All of sudden another cat appeared by her side—a curly cinnamon tortoiseshell appeared by her side, his lips curled in mock.

"Ebony," she greeted with a small nod. Ebony, wasn't moved. His

eyes were focused on me, his eyes alight in hunger. I let out a growl of discomfort knowing he would not be so easy to battle.

I turned my eyes toward Bee and stared at her, unmoved. "Need another cat to help fight your battles?" I taunt. Bee narrowed her eyes at me.

"Nope. Just to make it easier."

"Coward!" I yowled before launching myself at the Ebony. The tom snarled and slammed himself onto me. The two of us crashed together and rolled on the ground in a furry of claws and teeth.

"I'll make you clan cats pay for what you've done!" Ebony swiped at me but I lowered myself and dodged the strike. I then crouched my aimed my leap straight for his chest—hoping to knock his air out. However, after maintaining my focus on Ebony I forgot about Bee.

I let out a cry of surprise when I felt her jump onto my back and hooked one of her legs under mines before yanking me under—crashing me to the ground. I gasped in pain as I felt claws digging into my exposed sides. I blinked and saw Ebony towering over me with raging eyes.

"You won't be dying so easily," he rasped, his eyes watching me as I writhed under his claws. Bee appeared and helped Ebony pin me down.

Then the torment began.

I tried in vain to throw Ebony off of me but his and Bee's grip on me was deathly strong. That's when I felt claws dig into my flank. They worked furiously—tearing out my fur and leaving red claw marks against my pelt. Ebony took no mercy apparently. Not even as I screeched in pain.

He snarled and raised his paw before slamming it into my exposed flesh. He dug in, tearing the skin off slowly and let the blood drown my already slicked fur. My mouth flew open—choking back a pained sob.

I twisted violently which only earned a slash against my ears from

Bee. She seemed to enjoy watching me wrath in agony and I wanted nothing more than to tear her eyes out.

More flesh was torn and more blood was spilled onto the grass, splattered my face and Ebony's paw.

A howl ripped out of my throat as I jerked back from the treacherous amount of pain burning throughout my body. I couldn't breathe simply because the movement agonized my wounds even more.

The torture was unbearable, and I could do nothing other that scream and writhe weakly under the clamped paws.

I closed my eyes, the sudden pain and exhaustion overwhelming me. My mind spiraled uncontrollably and I was left in a haze. My body suddenly relaxed and I found closing my eyes more and more comforting.

And then—

The weight on top of me vanished which then followed with a caterwauling yowl that snapped me out of my trance. My eyes flew open and I saw a flash of brown slam into Ebony throwing him off me. I slowly raise my head and watched as Ebony was dragged and flung down by a dark brown tom—strikingly familiar.

Thornpaw!

While Thornpaw fought Ebony, I decided to now take the time to attack Bee. I turn toward Bee—who was preoccupied by the fight—and sank my teeth into her forepaws. I shut my eyes and bit down as hard as possible followed with a horrifying crunch of the bone. Bee shrieked and broke free from me.

Worn and aching, I collapsed back down and exhaled repeatedly. I told myself to breath and that I'be fine.

Behind me, I could hear the yowls of Ebony and Bee as he fought them off. And then, they disappeared. Thornpaw watched them for a little bit longer before he made his way over to me. He knelt down and gave my shredded ears a lick.

"Hey," he hissed. "Are you okay?"

I blinked. "Do I look okay?"

Thornpaw nudged my shoulder. I sat up and winced in pain. "You look wonderful," he replied.

"Thank you."

Thornpaw narrowed his eyes at me and sniffed the wounded inflicted by Ebony. "You're losing a lot of blood," he meowed.

"Cobwebs," I whispered. "…..stops blood."

Thornpaw stared at me for a moment before he disappeared undergrowth. After a while, he appeared holding a wad of cobwebs under his paw. He walked over to me and pressed it against the pool of blood forming.

I let out a sigh of relief when I saw the blood stop flowing. "Thank you," I said. "And I mean it."

Thornpaw shrugged. "It's a battle. It's the least I can do."

I nodded. "I have to go."

"Stay safe," he murmured and looked at me before he ran off. I turn around and padded through the trees. My body was aching terribly and I already exhausted though the battle was still raging.

Wasn't Willownose around here? I wondered. *I should find her and make sure she's okay.*

I was about to run through the thicket when an agonizing yowl made me freeze in my tracks. My blood suddenly turned cold and my heart clenched within my chest sending panic though me.

No, I thought. *No. No. No. It's not what I think it. It's not who I think it is.*

The voice—all to familiar made me frozen. Still as if time had stopped ticking. I slowly turn my head toward the voice and just

saw the glimpse of *her* crumpling to the ground.

My eyes blurred for a heart-beat and I blinked furiously, hoping that I was hallucinating. But once I looked again, I was sure that I wasn't breathing at all.

"Please stop," I choke out, my eyes strained to that one spot. To that one spot where Willownose had collapsed and lay on the ground unmoving and completely still. Her eyes was wide open and they were locked with my round, shocked ones.

Standing on top of her was a dark ginger tom with unruly and ruffled fur sticking on all edges. His claws were sharp and smudged with crimson red. And I then knew that her blood was stained in his paws. Before I could even make a move, the tom leaped away and disappeared within the bushes.

Swallowing tightly, I ran over to Willownose's body. My throat was enclosed tightly, as if it had woven itself together and prevented me from breathing. I prodded Willownose's shoulder hoping that she'll slowly raise her head and say she's fine but flinched at the growing coldness of her body. I let out a shuddering gasp and push my nose deep into her fur.

"Willownose?" I whimper. I lean over and give her ears a lick. "Wake up. Please?"

When there was no response, I rested my head over her head trying to consume everything at once but everytime I did, I shattered all at once and had to pick up the remaining pieces that was left. Only, all of my parts was with Willownose. And now every part of me has died.

My chest was clenched, squeezing my heart so painfully I couldn't breath. The only time I could breath was the strangled gasps that would rack my body endlessly. I gazed at Willownose.

And I never even got to say goodbye.

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S I L E N T

the anger yowls and cries of pain filled my ears and I jumped from the bushes, Mallowtail at my side with Willownose at my other. I let out a furious yowl of rage and jumped at a near by dappled grey rouge tom.

The tom let out a wail of pain as my claws sink into his shoulder. Just as he was about to rear around and strike at me I let go of his should and jumped away from his sharp claws. I stumbled a bit on some pine needles and let out a hiss of annoyance before regaining my balance.

I hunched my shoulders and leaped back at the tom, swiping at his muzzle with furious blows. He yowled in pain and sent a massive blow to my cheek causing me to tumble backwards onto the wet grass.

The tom came charging at me, he lunged to pin me but at the last second I kicked out my hind legs and hit the grey tom in the chest. The tom was bigger then me so fell to the ground stung with shock. In that moment I regained my balance and lunged at him again.

I pinned down the tom and sent a blow to his cheek and bit off half of his ear, the tom let out a loud cry before kicking me off of him and fleeing for the under growth.

I hissed in satisfaction before turning to the ongoing battle. I swept my eyes over the clearing when suddenly a brush shook and Leafpaw, Dawnsky, and Petalshade leaped in the cluster of fighting cats to join the battle.

I was about to run to Leafpaws side when I heard Mallowtails wail of pain. I turned and saw me was being pinned down by the same 2

toms that attacked us at Pointed Claw Rock, Fang and Flint.

Fang has Mallowtail pinned to the ground while Flint stoke blows at Mallowtails face and shoulders. I yowled in rage and lunged myself at Flint we crashed though multiple cats before I had the tom pinned down.

While Flint was in shock I stoke blows at his face and ears before I felt some cat pull me off of the tom. I was about to turn to fight the cat pulling me away when I saw it was Mallowtail, the toms ear was shredded and he had a nasty wound on his muzzle. "Silentpaw, Listen, I need you to go to clan and get help! We are badly outnumbered." Mallowtail hissed.

I nodded and dived across the clearing to the bushes but before I ran back into the dense forest of Skyclan territory I caught the gaze of a familiar rouge calico she-cat who was going claw to claw with a dark brown apprentice.

The brown tom stoke a blow at the calico muzzle before he ran deeper into the cluster of fighting cats. Just then the calico turned her gaze to mine and I almost forgot my mission. I shook my head and ran though the bushes towards Skyclan camp.

My wounds burned as I ran through the trees and under growth but I knew I had to get to Skyclan camp before Shadowclan and Skyclan were all badly hurt, or killed.

I broke though the bushes and was met by the thorn barrier entrance, I dashed through and started yowling. "Finchstar! Finchstar! Finchstar!" I yowled over and over about to run to the rock slide path when Finchstar came running out her den and stood on the ledge where she does meetings.

"Silentpaw!" Finchstar yowled running down the rock slide path to me, her paws at missing a beat on her way down. "Cant a cat get some sleep around here-" Yowled Flakenose coming out from the elders den but the elder she-cat shut her mouth then she saw my battered wounds.

Parsleyseed came running out of his den with Ivypaw at his side

carrying herbs. "I smell blood, Shadowclan, and Rouges! Was there a battle?!?" The tom asked staring at me but my eyes didn't leave Finchstar.

Mouseclaw come running out of the warriors den and was followed by Honeywisp, Swiftleap, Snowpebble, and leapflight. Everyone one else gather around me while I explained what was happening to Finchstar.

"The rouges were attacking a Shadowclan patrol! Mallowtail decided to help and Dawnskys patrol showed up but we are still badly outnumber!" I wailed my paws were itching to get back to the battle and fight with my clanmates.

Finchstar nodded and yowled commands. "Cloudfur, Mouseclaw, Leapflight, Swiftleap, and Honeywisp! You all will come with us to fight, Parsleyseed and Ivypaw follow us with herbs. The rest of you stay and guard the camp." Finchstar yowled and turned to me. "show us the way."

My paws burned as me and Finchstars patrol busted through the bushes and lunged into battle. But my paws were rooted to the ground as I watched Leafpaw dash out of the bushes to a limb body laid out in the clearing.

I heard a gasp of horror from Mouseclaw and just then did I realize who was the cat limp on the wet floor of the forest. "Willownose!" Mouseclaw wailed running to his mate and I ran after him.

could no longer hear the sound of fighting around me all I could hear was the soft gasping of Mouseclaw shaking Willownose to try to wake her up as if it was a regular morning in Skyclan camp and Willownose was over sleeping while she had dawn patrol.

Mouseclaw buried his muzzle into his mates neck and mumbled soft pleads to Starclan. I feel at my mothers side and buried my face in her soft pelt that would soon be as cold as stone.

Leafpaw seemed to not even notice we arrived, she was staring towards some bushed blankly.

I could feel eyes on me but I didn't care all I cared about was Willownose. A shocked wail made me look up and I was met with Finchstars shocked face, the ginger she-cat ran over and started speaking to Mouseclaw in a hushed tone.

Just then did I realize the battle was over, I could see Parsleyseed going from cat to cat when he stopped and stared at Willownose. He flicked his tail to Ivypaw who was cleaning a ShadowClan cats wounds and pointed to Willownose with his tail before helping Petalshade with a wound on her side.

The medicine cat apprentice rushed over and put a soft paw on Willownoses flank before sighing. "She's dead." Ivypaw mewed simply but I snapped. "Any cat could see that mouse brain!" I snarled at the black and silver tabby. My claws dug into the soft ground while Mallowtail padded over to us.

"Ivypaw is doing her job, Silentpaw, she's our future medicine cat." Mallowtail mewed trying to put his tail on my flank but my rage was unmatched and I dug a claw into Mallowtails tail.

The tom hissed in surprise as I stood and hissed at him before running out of the clearing back towards Skyclan territory. My vision blurred as I ran non stop.

After running for StarClan knows how long I ended up at the ThunderClan border and almost ran over the scent line, luckily I stopped myself in time. I walked along the ThunderClan border sulking, *it was my fault! I should have been there, I should have been there to stop the monster who killed her!*

I should have fought by her side then none of this would have happened. My paw steps began to become clumsy so I sat under a tree very close to where Skyclan territory was at a stop because of the mountain walls.

I tucked my tail over my paws and memories of Willownose flashed through my thoughts. Her love, her warmth, her good natural.

I closed my eyes and laid down for a few minutes before the sound of paw steps drifted into my ears. My ears perked and I sat up

straight, looking around the small clearing I was in. Suddenly a flash of white fur caught the corner of my eye and I whipped my head around me see, "Hawk!?!"

I mewed loudly, but not threateningly more curious. "Why are you here?!? If my clanmates catch even a sniff of your scent they will chase you down." I hissed my pelt starting bristle.

Hawk just stared back at me with a serious look on her face, her eyes were round but her ears were perked. "I'm sorry for your loss." The rouge she-cat mewed quietly. I stared at Hawk and suddenly remembered how I had seen her during the battle.

I dug my claws into the ground and gritted my teeth. "One of your rouge friends **killed** my mother," I stated lowering my head to the ground. Hawks serious face turned into sympathy and the rouge patted slowly to my side.

I could smell her fear scent. "I-I don't know who killed your mother." Hawk mewed looking at my lowered head before turning her gaze to the sky. "I'm not really a popular cat in the rouges group, so I wouldn't know the plans of attack." Hawks eyes traveled to me. "I'm sorry."

Hawk said before getting up and starting to walk towards the under growth. fear overcame me and I jumped up just as Hawk was about to slither into the darkness. "Wait!" I called and suddenly realized what I had done.

My paws seemed rooted to the ground as Hawk turned a curious gaze to me, my mouth felt dry and no words came out. We simply stared at each other for a few moments before I finally was able to speak. "Please don't leave..." Hawks eyes widened.

"I-I, I don't want to be alone. I can't go back to camp, so, why don't we talk or something like that." I whispered sitting back down and wrapping my tail over my paws while looking down shamefully.

I didn't even notice the white pelt slipping to my side and resting her head against my shoulder. "Sure, I can stay awhile."

* * *

I let out a loud huff of laughter as Hawk stumbled trying to chase Squirrel up a tree, but the rouge she-cat couldn't get her claws right and kept falling. "Ughhhh, I hate trees!" Hissed the calico.

At that I couldn't hold in my laughter anymore. I fell back on the grass and nearly yowled with laughter at Hawks "amazing tree skills" as the rouge called it. "You have to hook your claws deep into the bark." I started explaining while heading towards Hawk who was sulking at the trunk of the tree.

"When you dig your claws in you have to use your back legs to hurl yourself up the tree." I explained. I got to Hawks side and as swiftly hurled myself up the tree to the first branch. I admired the dense forest of SkyClan territory before looking back down at Hawk.

The calico was staring at me and she had suck surprise on her face. "How did you do that?!? It was like you ran up the tree like a squirrel!?!" Hawks yowl rang and I hissed at her to hush. Yes we were alone but Finchstar could send a patrol our way and I didn't want to have to explain to my clanmates why I was hanging out with a rouge.

A rustling noise came from above me and I looked up to see the squirrel Hawk had been chasing. bracing myself I hunched my shoulders and aimed for the next branch, quicker then before I shot from the first branch and to the second, then the third, and the forth.

this continued until I was at the branch the squirrel had been sitting on, I sniffed and realized there was a make shift hole in the tree and squirrel scent was covering it.

I crept closer to the hollow and swiftly stuck my head in to clamp the squirrels neck in my jaws. The squirrel let out a tiny squeak of surprise before it fell limp in my jaws.

I pushed my way back down the branches with the squirrel in my jaws and I could see Hawks face and I could tell the rouge was impressed by my hunting skills. I dropped to the last branch and

then landed on the soft grass of the forest

I laid down the squirrel and tore off some flesh before pushing it towards Hawk. The calico looked at me in surprise. "What?" I asked, "Nothing, we rouges just don't really share prey." Hawk answered before tearing a small limb from the squirrel.

My eyes widened as Hawk pushed the squirrel towards me again. "Rouges don't share their prey?!? What about queens with nursing kits? Who gives them food!?" I questioned now ignoring the squirrel at my paws.

Hawk stared at me for a moment her eyes curious. "Queens?" The calico echoed and I realized that rouges probably don't call nursing she-cats the same name as warriors do. "Nursing she-cats with kits." I explained tilting my head, *are rouges really so different from us?*

"The she-cats mate gets her food or her kin if they want to, if the she-cat does not have a mate she has to get her own food." Hawk explained nonchalantly.

My pelt bristled and I stood up. "Here in the clans if we have a qu-she-cat with kits the apprentices bring her food or she takes some from the fresh kill for her and her kits." I explained trying not to imagine the rouges who probably starved because they couldn't feed their kits.

hawk notice that I wasn't eating the squirrel and pushed it back to her before replying. "You clan cats just has a lot of class, outside the mountain range us rouges fight with each other to survive." Hawk started.

"We fight over scrap cans, warm places to sleep, places to live and raise a family." Hawk finished looking down at her paws. Sympathy washed over me for the rouges but I knew I couldn't feel great sympathy for them, after all one of Hawks own clan mates killed my mother.

Grief for Willownose washed over me again and a grabbed the squirrel and gulped down the rest. Hawk gave me a questioning look before I jumped up. "Hey! Lets take a walk, I can tell you more

about the clans!" I mewed started to trot towards the trees.

Hawk trotted to my side and we starting heading down the end of Skyclan territory. Since this was the very edge and far behind the camp no cat really came here so me and Hawk wouldn't be caught.

It felt nice to be out of camp for awhile with a friend to talk to, I knew if I stayed in camp with the grief of Willownose on my mind I wouldn't get a moment of peace.

I turned to Hawk with the brightest look I could come up with. "Ask me anything about the clans!" I mewed. Hawk thought for a moment before asking, "Why do Warriors have weird names? I mean, your name is Silentpaw that's very weird to us rouges." Hawk thought for a moment before continuing. "We have a cat in the rouges named Foxscar, and I've met cats named like Driftwood or Spiderweb but names like are rare."

"Well, cats are named based on their age. Cats who are under the age of 6 moons are kits, then after the 6 moons they become a apprentice and 'kit changes to 'paw, then after training for many moons the apprentice earns their warriors name!" I explained remembering the days of my kithood.

"So, you were named Silentkit at birth?"

"Yep!"

"And now your Silentpaw because your a apprentice?"

"exactly!"

"what's your warriors name going to be?"

"Well I don't know yet." I started, "Finchstar, our leader, gives us our warrior names." I mewed.

"What are you hoping your name will be?" Hawk asked with a curious face. I thought for a moment, "I've never really thought about it. Maybe Silentclaw or SilentPelt. Your never know until you get your warriors name!" I mewed.

Suddenly Hawk stopped in her tracks and perked her ears, I stopped walking and turned to the calico. "What's wrong?" I asked sniffing the air.

Hawks hackles raised and she turned to me with narrowed eyes, I could see panic past them. "I have to go," Hawk stated and ran over to the bushes but before she pushed through she turned back to me, her gaze softening. "Lets meet again soon, ok?"

"Sure!" I mewed and Hawk dashed through the under growth running towards the mountain walls.

I was disappointed but I knew I had to get back to camp before Finchstar sent out a search party for me. I looked up at the sky and saw the first stars of SilverPelt starting to show themselves.

I let a sigh before starting to head towards camp.

The thorn barrier came into view and I pushed through to be met with a clan of worried and anxious cats. Finchstar and Mallowtail were outside of Finchstars den, Parsleyseed and Ivypaw were helping Petalshade to the med den, while Dawnsky, Cloudfur, Honeywisp, and Swiftleap sat outside the med den, all with cobwebs and herbs spread across their wounds.

Willownoses limp body lay in the center of camp. Leafpaw, Mouseclaw, and Leapfight laid down next to the body waiting for the vigil for Willownose to begin. Stoneheart padded Leapfights side and gently picked behind her ears before sitting next to her.

Snowpebble and Ravenwing spoke in hushed tones at the edge of the clearing while Foxwhisker, Flowerheart, and Flakenose trotted from the elders den to wait for the vigil to start. Embernose followed slowly behind Parsleyseed into the med den, and Blackpaw raced to his mentor when the apprentice saw me enter camp.

Mouseclaws ear twitched as I pushed through the thorn barrier, my father got up and ran to me and rubbed his cheek to mine. "Silentpaw! Thank StarClan your okay, after you ran off I wanted to look for you but your mother-" Mouseclaw tried to explain but

stopped as I cut him off.

"Mouseclaw its fine, I'm sorry I ran off, I wanted some time alone.." I half lied to my father. Mouseclaw smiled warmly before we both made our way to Willownoses body.

I laid down next to Leafpaw who was quiet and looking down at her paws. I felt guilty for leaving her alone but I didn't regret the time I spent with Hawk.

14 | broken

2/28

T H O R N

I let out a hiss of pain as Beestripe slaps a poultice of marigold onto my wounds. "Hold still!" She snaps as she scoops out another paw full of poultice.

"That would be nice if they didn't sting," I growled, unsheathing my claws and sinking them into the soft, wet ground. Beestripe paused and gave an irritated glance.

"You survived the battle with these wounds haven't you? And the days before when you came into my den with wounds?" She pointed out. "So I don't see why you need to complain. Shut your mouth and let me finish."

My shoulders stiffen slightly but I stayed quiet, not wanting to get my ears more slashed by Beestripe. I sat still and silently kept the complaints to myself. After a while, she stepped back an examined my wounds.

"Perfect," she mewed. "Now, that wasn't so hard was it? Off you go." She flicked her tail at me and nodded me at the mouth of the den. I gave her my thanks and padded out into the open. My paws hit the wet ground as I made my way over to Nightpaw and Smokepaw—my siblings. They were talking in hushed tones then perked up when they saw me.

"Thornpaw!" Nightpaw exclaimed. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm alive you know that right?" I meowed and sat down, giving them both an odd look.

"Well a few days ago, I thought you weren't," Smokepaw retorted. Her eyes then grew round. "You don't understand how guilty we felt

when you arrived all bloody and bruised."

I stared at both my of my sisters surprised that they were even feeling such way. It's not their fault I was in a border patrol and ended up being attacked by rouges. I mean, being an apprentice means learning and honing your skills for such events like these, right? I came back—yeah bruised—but I came back.

"It's not your fault," I assured and blinked at them both gratefully They both stared at me back, the same worried and guilt looks. I continued, hoping that they would be reassured with my words. "I don't see why you guys are tearing yourself up. I'm glad for your concerns and sympathy but don't break yourselves down over something that you can't even control."

Nightpaw winced. "Say that to Silvermist." I snorted, amused—remembering how the silver molly had completely freaked out she saw her kit come back bloodied and wounded. I didn't blame her though. I was in a really bad shape.

"Anyways! Are you finally able head back to your duties?" Smokepaw asked. She licked her paw and brought it over her ear.

"Yeah, I finally," I said. My ears then twitched as I saw Pinethistle making his way over to me. His fur was groom, slicked though I could see the green mucky poultice against his dark brown fur. "Beestripe says that you are able to go to your duties," he meowed.

I nodded. Pinethistle's eyes gleamed. "Good, we will head out for a hunting patrol later on in the evening. You're free to do whatever you want for now."

"Okay," I meowed. Once Pinethistle turned around and headed over to the nursery, I faced Nightpaw and Smokepaw. "Free time?"

"Nope!" Nightpaw jumped to her paws. She rolled her eyes. "Battle training—after everything you know?" I let out a sigh, knowing exactly what she meant. The attack of the rouges not only happened on Shadowclan but on Skyclan also. Not to mention Thymestar from Windclan acting all mysterious ever since the gathering. Thistlestar grew rigid from the attack and issued more borders, night time

patrols, guards, and heavy, intense battle training.

"Everything seems so tense now," Smokepaw pitched in. "The rouges had previously attacked Skyclan and now us." She shook her head. "They're serious alright. And there are rumors going around saying that a Skyclan warrior died."

At her sudden words, I felt my heartbeat increase—slamming against my chest as I replayed the memories of the previous battle events. The memories of watching a red tabby sinking into the floor as she watched someone she loved die right in front of her.

Smokepaw turned to me, her whiskers twitching. "Is it true?"

"Yeah." I closed my eyes and pushed the thoughts away as my mind already started screaming for me to stop thinking about her. *Her*. As soon as I met her, she seemed to occupy most of my mind. Most of the time. I couldn't stop thinking about the first time we met and it annoyed me.

It annoyed me how easily I was distracted because I met some Skyclan apprentice that apparently had a sharp mouth and played cocky. I hated it. Because I never got distracted. I didn't allow small things stray me off the road.

So why—

"Well! I have to go," Nightpaw meowed, pulling me out my thoughts. She waved her tail at us and ran over to where Oakstep, Stormsight, and Shadepaw was waiting near the entrance. When I looked at Shadepaw, I instantly regretted it since simply looking at him or breathing the same air with him simply means a challenge. He would always snarl or glare at me every time I tried to talk to him or even go over to him. Now, he hated more than ever ever since Lakepaw started showing more interest in me.

It's not my fault she likes me, I thought annoyed. *And I'm not even head over heels for her*.

Shadepaw narrowed his eyes to slits as his cruel dark eyes glared into mine. I felt a shiver run through my spine as I looked into his

eyes. Something told me that the dark gray tom had a darkness that no one could fathom. I fought back a shudder and turned away from the tom and walked over to the fresh-kill pile. I picked up a shrew and sat down, tearing into it.

Shadowclan was nestled in a huge shallow ditch. The edges of the camp—which were the walls—were coated with brambles, ivy, thorn bushes for protection. The entrance was covered with thorned-brambles and had a small slope that led into the ditch of the camp. Right in the middle of the camp, there is a huge jagged rock called the Meeting Rock. The Meeting Rock is where Thistlestar would call out clan meetings. To the right, there is a smooth rock surface where the fresh-kill is.

To the left of the Meeting Rock is the leader's den. Next to the leaders den is the nursery following the medicine cat den which was burrowed in a hole in the ground. Next to the medicine cat den was the elders den, then apprentice den and then finally the warriors den.

I plucked a shrew from the pile and sat a few mouse-tail lengths from it. Bending down, I took a bite-savoring the flesh of the prey. I suddenly felt relaxed within the camp even though I knew it was that simple. But just for a moment, it felt nice to not worry about the rouges and safety. I was left in deep in my thoughts that I jolted in surprise when I felt something barrel into my side.

I jump up from my spot, my instincts taking over—flattened my ears against my head and unsheathed my claws. However much to my surprise, it was a small brown fur ball. With eyes. And ears. And a mouth.

"Maplekit!" A voice cried out. I look down and tilted my head at Maplekit who was laying on her back and let out a squeal when she saw me staring at her.

"Sorry! I didn't—didn't mean to bump into you!" She gasped and quickly scrambled to her feet. She gave her pelt a quick shake and stared at me with innocent amber eyes. Brindlestone—Pinethistle's mate—came running over to me.

"I'm so sorry, Thornpaw," she mewed quickly and glared at Maplekit. Aspenkit, her brother peered from behind his mother's heels at the commotion. He blinked at his mother before staring at Maplekit.

"It's fine," I meowed, amused. It was his mentor's kits after all. And from his eyes, he could see the fiery personality of Pinethistle within Maplekit and the shy, quiet nature of Brindlestone in Aspenkit. Only more shyer.

Brindlestone hurried over to Maplekit and quickly snatched her up. The queen then curled her tail around Aspenkit and led them back toward the nursery.

I picked my shrew up and moved somewhere else to finish it. Once I was done, I walked over to the apprentice den and decided to take a small nap. I slid into the warmth of the nest and as I slowly drifted off to sleep, I suddenly wondered where *she* was. And if *she* was okay.

* * *

"Thornpaw! Wake up!" A voice screamed into my ears propelling me forward from my nest. My eyes shot open and was instantly blinded by the brightness lashing into my eyes. I let out a growl and squinted my gaze a hazy and my thoughts scattering. I sighed.

And I was having a nice dream running through the open marsh until someone decided to ruin it.

I look again and see Pinethistle sitting near the apprentice entrance, his ears twitching irritably. "Are you still asleep?" He yowled—loud enough that the whole mountain most likely woke up. I flattened my ears, wincing.

"Was," I muttered. I yawned and stretched in my nest—stretching my stiff bones as I slowly got to my feet. Blinking, I turn to the nest next to me and found grey tabby snoozing in a ball. My eyes narrowed.

Lakepaw! Not her, I mentally groaned and cringed away from the

tabby. I tried not to retch in disgust at the thought of another cat brushing their fur and sleeping against me. I kicked the dirt toward her, wishing she would understand that her efforts to get closer to me was futile. I stormed out of my den and pelted over to where Pinethistle and Rosewillow was sitting.

"Finally," she huffed. "Right, let's go."

The dark cream she-cat turned around and pushed past the barriers of the entrance. Once we reached outside, the wet marshland squelched under our already muddy paws.

"Which border are we heading towards?" I asked.

"Thistlestar wants us to closely guard the Skyclan and forrest borders," Rosewillow meowed. I frowned.

"But one of them *just* came back," I pointed out. I remembered the patrol Nightpaw was on—she definitely was patrolling near the Skyclan border since I caught their scent on her fur. "Why are we patrolling there again?"

Rosewillow halted before turning toward me. Her eyes were clear blue-sharp against her dark cream fur. "Let me re-word my response then. We'll be hunting near the border."

She stared at me as if she wanted me to say something else to challenge her. I held my tongue, not wanting to anger the hot-headed she-cat. I tried not to roll my eyes in pique as she looked away—her satisfied response to my quietness. I never knew how to feel about Rosewillow. She was a very hot-headed she-cat that liked to keep her problems on the edge of toes so then she can simply leap on them if she tripped. Not only that, she didn't like it when her orders or Thistlestar's orders were disobeyed or questioned. If they were, she would get real snarky and angry about it.

Her superiority of the warriors laid higher than the leader itself. But her loyalty itself would never be questioned. Pinethistle narrowed his eyes at the deputy. "Thistlestar seems to be more on the edge."

Rosewillow shook her head. "He's just taking proper precautions."

Pinethistle didn't say anymore and the patrol continued their walk toward Skyclan. The marsh was getting more mucky and wetter since the snow slowly began to melt. It then occurred to me that winter was almost coming to an end and that new-leaf was going to come soon.

But it also is a good thing, I thought. *If there are going to be more fighting and attacks from the rouges, at least the clan can support themselves with prey.*

"Alright," Rosewillow mewed. "We're here."

She looked around and examined the area. "I'll hunt more further into the trees," she said and pointed toward the side where the trees grew thicker-where the rouges probably came from.

"Be careful," Pinethistle warned. "The rouges can be lurking around the place—"

"I'll be fine," she mewed briskly. "I'll be hunting in the nearby, so if I see anything I'll let you know." Rosewillow then turned around snd quickly trotted into the shadows.

"You'll be alright on your own?" Pinethistle asked. "I won't be assessing you since you're still injured. You deserve a break." He then paused and gave me a proud look. "I saw you fighting those rouges, Thornpaw. You did an amazing job."

I blinked at my mentor gratefully and gave my chest fur an awkward lick.

"I'll be fine," I tell him. Pinethistle nodded and then disappeared into the marsh. I turned around and skirted away from the trees and more closer to the border.

I kept my ears alert for any signs of prey. I made sure to keep my paw steps light and my tail still. I looked around and then stopped when I heard a twig snap. The sound alone made me prick my ears and turn toward the noise. I lifted my chin and tasted the air, instantly catching the smell of a shrew. Narrowing my eyes, I went into a crouch and stalked my way over to it.

I stilled at the sound of light steps across the ground and my ear twitched as the sound got louder and louder. I waited for a moment before springing forward and crashing into the bush. The shrew let out a squeal of terror and was about to scamper away but I slammed my paws over it and killed it with a quick bite. I sat up with a shrew hinged in my jaw when a snarl made me go rigid.

"Who's there?"

I paused, wondering whether I was imagining things or not but when the same familiar scent wisped into my nose, and I knew that it was her again.

I dropped the shrew and quickly threw dirt over it before making my way over to where I heard the voice. The strong scent of the Skyclan and Shadowclan scents told me that I was at the border. On the other side there was a reddish-brown she-cat staring into the open with narrowed eyes. *Leafpaw.*

I appeared from the bushes and she let out a hiss.

"Are you seriously asking who's there when you're standing near the clans border?" I asked. Leafpaw stared at me—somewhat surprised. She shook her head and looked away, muttering something which I catched "not you again".

"What are you doing here?" I questioned once again. I twitched my ears hoping to keep a lookout for Pinethistle and Rosewillow. The deputy wouldn't be pleased if she catches sight of us talking

Leafpaw shrugged and stared at the ground. "I don't know," she mumbled. I stared at her, wondering what happened to the cocky, confident she-cat I met. But now, she seemed to have disappeared. Her body was slackened as if it was an effort to stay up, her green-blue eyes were distant and heavy with so many emotions.

"I heard what happened to Willownose," I murmured softly. Leafpaw shoulders sagged even more.

"So? Is that suppose to help me?"

I stayed silent knowing that her sharpness wasn't intended but more

of her way of coping. The silence between us stretched and I struggled to form words to help her but I couldn't because I already know the types of apologies she got from her clan mates. Telling her the same thing would be no different.

Leafpaw swallowed tightly. "It's too much," she whispered. Her voice was shaky and unstable. She unsheathed her claws and dug them into the ground. "I can't get the image of her lying on the ground and staring at me with those eyes."

I watched her, my heart already being torn. I couldn't imagine what it must be like to lose your mother. An image of Silvermist dying flashed through my mind and I shook my head to get rid of the thought.

"It's like it's my fault that she's gone," Leafpaw rasped. "Because—"

"Leafpaw, it's one thing to grieve about something that was inevitable but blaming yourself is out of question," I interrupt. I didn't mind her venting but blaming on herself was something I definitely am not going to watch. I knew how well blaming something on themselves could cost.

She blinked at me as if she realized that I was there. "How could you know?"

"Because I understand you," I insisted. Leafpaw stared at me, her eyes coated with disbelief.

"No you don't—"

"Of all the cats out there—has there ever been one to ask what you've been through? To actually know what you feel? You don't even know what you do to me and I don't even know you, but here I am heartbroken for you."

Leafpaw looked shocked. She reeled back and flattened her ears as she stared at me. "I can't trust you," she protested. "You're a Shadowclan cat and they are known to be heartless and sneaky." She suddenly looked guilty and horrified for her actions; telling me her weakness. She shuffled away from me, her eyes round and so

lost, so broken for her stupid actions. She seemed done with herself —for revealing something to a clan cat and for something she can't take it back. She looked ready to collapse, to simply disintegrate from stress and burden that she was carrying and I could see it. I could see her suffering so silently it was breaking everything within me.

"You can't assume that," I tell her gently. "I'm not heartless. It's okay to vent about your feelings you know?"

She looked lost for words. My ears then shot up as I heard paw steps heading toward my way. My fur spiked up as the sound got louder and louder. I turned back to Leafpaw. "I hear someone coming our way," I told her. Leafpaw let out a stressed hiss.

"Wait!" I growled. Leafpaw paused from where she was crouching, ready to spring away. "Meet me again."

"What?" She looked at me, her eyes widening in horror. "Why?"

"Why not?" I said. When she didn't look convinced I pressed on. "I think we need a break from everything and you deserve a break. Meet me here," I hissed.

Leafpaw opened her mouth to say something but I quickly whirled around and hurried to where my shrew was buried. I picked the shrew up by its tail and quickly hurried to where I heard the paw steps.

Pinethistle!

"Thornpaw?"

"Here," I panted.

"Where have you been?" Pinethistle demanded as he made his way over to me.

"I was trying to hunt and watch over the borders," I explained. Pinethistle looked curious. "Was there any suspicious activities?"

My mind wandered back to Leafpaw. "No, none that we should be

worried of."

"Then let's continue hunting."

I nodded, following my mentor deeper into the pine forest though I couldn't help but look over my shoulder to where she had stood.

15 | prisoner

3/14

S I L E N T

I dug my claws into the earth and slashed my tail from side to side. *This will be it, I can do this!*

I narrowed my eyes and moved my gaze to the cats right shoulder when in reality I will be aiming for their left shoulder. I hunched my shoulders and was about to spring when a loud angry yowling came from the edge of the training hollow.

"For Starclans sake Leafpaw!!" Dawnsky snarled lashing her tail. "You need to have a firm hold on the ground before you can spring or else you will loose your balance. This is beginners stuff, you should know this!?!" Dawnsky yowled once more before turning her back to Leafpaw and storming over to Mallowtail to speak with him in private.

As the warriors abandoned the clearing I turned my gaze to Leafpaw who was staring down at her paws, her ears folded back with extended claws.

I could feel my sister grief from across the hollow. It has been half a moon since Willownoses death and the clan is still grieving for their lost clanmate.

Mouseclaw still made himself useful and kept up with his warriors duties but any cat could tell by the warriors movements that Mouseclaw missed his mate. Every night he would stare up to Silver pelt whispering to myself.

Leafpaw was different. She was having a hard time keeping up with her apprentice duties and would always snap at any cat who would cross her path, besides me and Mouseclaw.

I was like Mouseclaw continuing with my duties but always doing more. I figured that if I worked hard I wouldn't feel any grief and it would be like old times. But I knew it could never be the same.

My meetings with Hawk has continued, the rouge she-cat always took my mind off my duties and Willownose. Hawk always was sneaking around Skyclan territory when she wanted to talk to me. I'd watch the rouge she-cat follow me on patrols and when no cat was looking I would meet with her and exchange a few words before the patrol called me back.

The calico made me feel alive again, I didn't feel like I had any responsibilities with her at my side. She made me happy, the happiest I've been in moons.

I snapped my thoughts of Hawk away and padded to Leafpaws side. "What are you and Dawnsky working on?" I asked trying to lighten my sisters mood. Leafpaw shifted her paws and turned to me, "Beginners stuff said by Dawnsky." Leafpaw huffed.

"Well, maybe we can train together! I could ask Mallowtail, I'm sure he'll say yes!" I mewed excitedly jumping up. Leafpaw turned to me with narrowed eyes before shaking her head. "I'm not in the mood, I'll be off hunting now." Leafpaw said before dashing to the edge of the hollow and disappearing into the trees

Just as Leafpaw got out of sight Dawnsky and Mallowtail pushed back into the clearing. Dawnskys eyes sharpened as she saw I was the only cat in the clearing. "Where is Leafpaw?!?" Dawnsky mewed.

"She went hunting alone." I answered the she-cat before turning to Mallowtail. "Can we practice tree cilmbing? I feel my skills going to waste ground hunting all the time." I mewed looking towards to sun to see it was at its highest.

Mallowtail flicked his bushy tail before nodding. "Yes, Leafpaw will join us later when she returns from hunting." Mallowtail gave Dawnsky a nod before the deputy flicked his tail ordering me to follow him.

After some walking we arrived at a clearing with a tree planted straight in the middle, even from a few fox-lengths away I could see the claw marks carved into the trees bark.

Mallowtail called me over to him with a flick of his tail and raised his muzzle to the tree. "I want you to climb up that tree as fast as you can," Mallowtail mewed then using his tail to point to a branch that was about half way up the tree.

"Stop there then come back, I will time you." Mallowtail mewed, I will admit my mentor has been giving me the cold shoulder since the day Willownose died and I ran off alone. I don't regret going off alone that day. I doubt I ever will.

At the flick of Mallowtails ear I raced my way up the tree and dig my claws into the bark. Clinging to the bark for a moment before hissing and pushing upwards.

The weight pushed on my claws were only painful if I stuck to the bark for to long. I dug my claws into a branch above my head and clung there for a few moments before hurling my self to the top of the branch and soon jumping to the next.

After a few more moments I reached my stopping point and took a breath before hurling my self down the tree. I landed on three paws and stumbled a bit on the branch but managed to not fall and then landed safely next to Mallowtail.

The deputy gave me a nob and a approving gleam sown in his eyes. "You beat your own record." Mallowtail mewed while a stuck my tail high in the air, I was about to say something when a familiar scent floated into my nose. *Hawk?!?*

I moved my head towards the smell and saw the calico crouching inside the bush, *I wanna talk to you.* The Calico mouthed with a soft and comforting yet goofy smile.

"Do you smell that?" Mallowtail asked snapping my gaze away from Hawk, Mallowtail was sniffing the air with a curious look and I flicked my tail at Hawk telling her to leave.

The rouge understood and I saw out of the corner of my eye the calico pushing through the bushes to get back to the territory border when a sound wail of a bird perched my ears.

Mallowtail hissed and ran towards the bush Hawk was hiding in. "Silentpaw come on! I smell a rouge!" Called my mentor. I followed behind him, worry flashed through me. *Starclan please let Hawk be ok...* I prayed silently.

Mallowtail came to a stop in a area surrounded by thorn bushes and there lay a calico pelt.

All of Silentpaws body told her to run to Hawk and make sure her friend was ok but she knew Mallowtail would be suspicious and ask if she knew the rouge. Mallowtail looked like he was about to pounce at Hawk but a stood infront of him.

"She's hurt Mallowtail, She's no threat to us!" I mewed standing in between Hawk and Mallowtail. Mallowtail lashed out his paw to but me away and sniffed at Hawk.

"Yuck!" Mallowtail hissed, "Do rouges even wash!?!" Suddenly Hawks body jerked and she sat up, Mallowtail backed back to my side and that's when I saw Hawks bloody leg. Once Hawk noticed us her ears flattened against her head and she cowered below Mallowtail.

"I'm really sorry! I'm no threat! I was just hungry, I didn't know I stepped on to Clan territory." Hawk pleaded her innocence before Mallowtail shushed her with a snarl. "Don't plead, stand up your coming with us to our camp." Mallowtail snarled and flicked his tail for Hawk to walk behind him while I was at the rear.

Worry spiked through me as we made our way in the direction of camp but I felt a gentle tail swipe past my paw and saw Hawk looking at me.

The rouges gaze was full of pain with a spike of mischievous. I signaled with my tail for Hawk to slow down a bit and waited for Mallowtail get a few more paw steps ahead before I spoke quietly. "Why did you come? I told you that you can't wander Skyclan

territory whenever you feel like it." I mewed swiping at Hawks ear.

The calico laughed quietly as to not let Mallowtail know they were talking. "I was bored and wanted to see you." Hawk mewed, and for some reason Hawk admitting to wanted to see her and putting herself in danger just to see her made Silentpaws bellyache with a weird feeling.

"Flew pelt hurry up!" Mallowtail hissed as he noticed Me and Hawk trailing behind. "Sorry Mallowtail this cat wants to sniff at every blade of grass on the territory." I mewed and gave Hawk a teasing look.

Mallowtail glared at Hawk before continuing on towards the camp. I noticed Hawks pelt prickle with fear and suddenly thought if Finchstar would try to hurt her. *No, Finchstar would never do that.*

Mallowtail came to a stop and I noticed that we made reached the thorn barrier. The deputy turned to me, "Watch this cat while I get Finchstar." Mallowtail mewed before slipping through the thorn barrier.

Hawk pelt prickled more and a ran my tail across her back, "Don't worry, your no threat to Finchstar, she'll probably just give you a warning then let you go." I reassured the calico when Finchstars scent touched my nose and I backed away from Hawk.

Hawk turned towards the thorn barrier as Finchstar pushed through with Mallowtail just behind her. The ginger she-cat eyed Hawk up and down before sniffing the air. After a long silence Finchstar spoke. "So, your the cat who has been sniffing around our territory for the past half moon." Finchstar mewed with a slash of her tail.

My fur prickled in shock, *she's found Hawks scent before?!? But I thought I did so well covering up our tracks?!?* Fear surged through me, *does she know me and Hawk have been meeting?!?*

After Hawk didn't say anything Finchstar twitched her tail ordering us the follow her as she slipped back through the thorn barrier into camp. Hawk tensed and followed slowly.

The cats who were already in the clearing perked their ears and unsheathed their claws as they watched Hawk enter the clearing behind Finchstar and Mallowtail. I followed Hawk in the clearing and noticed Dawnsky and Leafpaw sharing a rabbit on the other side of the clearing.

Dawnsky jumped up from her spot and snarled at hawk, "Finchstar! I know this rouge, she's one of the rouge who attacked me, Mallowtail, and out apprentices on patrol!" Dawnsky snarled but Finchstar caught her eye and Dawnsky sat back down.

Hawks gaze stayed to the ground as more cats started approaching, Parsleyseed sat at the entrance of his den glaring at Hawk. Ivypaw joined her mentor not a minute later.

Finchstar stopped in the middle of the clearing and raised her voice for all the cats in the clearing to hear, "Mallowtail and Silentpaw found this rouge on our territory stealing our prey!" Finchstar yowled and cats in the clearing followed by yowls of outrage.

Every cat went silent as the thorn barrier swished and shook while Cloudfur, Swiftleap, Ravenwing, and Blackpaw pushed through. "Is everything alright?!? We found rouge sent by the training hollow and it lead here." Cloudfur explained his gaze traveling the whole clearing before it landed on Hawk.

"I knew it! I was right!" Wailed Blackpaw racing to face Hawk, "A stupid rouge did come onto our territory! I was right!" Blackpaw hissed going muzzle to muzzle with Hawk.

Hawk gave me a side glance and I know why, I had told the rouge about the annoying kit-apprentice for awhile and Hawk shared how a clan mate of hers, Bee, was always bothering her.

Hawk looked back towards Blackpaw and eyed the apprentice up and down, Blackpaw was younger then Hawk so Hawk stood over him like he was a helpless kit.

Cloudfur hissed and Blackpaw reluctantly backed away. Ravenwing didn't bat a eye at Blackpaw and turned towards Finchstar, "Finchstar why have you brought this rouge into our camp?" The

tom asked and shot a hostile glare at Hawk.

Finchstar turned to the tom then glanced at Hawk for a moment, "I think this thief could be at use to us." Finchstar states his tone was menacingly slow.

more cats from around the clearing gathered around Finchstar confused as to what their leader meant. "What do you mean Finchstar?" Mewed Honeywisp turning a curious gaze to her leader.

Finchstar gaze burned into Hawk pelt before the ginger she-cat pushed her way up the rock slide path and to the ledge right outside her den, Mallowtail followed and stood close to Finchstars side.

"Cats of Skyclan! We all know of the danger that the rouges bring to the Mountain Range territory, and we barley know anything of the rouges clan, not even their leader," Finchstar explained and my stomach flipped. *What will Finchstar do to Hawk?!?*

My worries for my friend increased as I heard Dawnsky snarl to Leafpaw, "Finchstar should force some information out of that pesky rouge." Dawnsky stated with a snarl and a lash of her tail, I turned towards my sister to see her face said nothing.

Finchstar continued, "I believe we should keep this rouge in our camp, force the imformation out of her mouth." Finchstar stated glaring at Hawk, Yowls of agreement flooded the camp. Hawks pelt spiked in fear, I sent Hawk a look saying 'I'm sorry' but as I was about to turn back to Finchstar I caught Honeywisps eyes.

The young warrior was staring at me with a unreadable look, my pelt bristled *does she know anything about me and Hawk?!?*

I huffed and flattened my pelt before any of my clanmates came me eyes of suspicion.

"Since we currently have no where for this," Finchstar paused turning her cold gaze to Hawk. "flee pelt, to stay so I've decided to have her kept in the nursery since it is as of right now empty." Finchstar swept as gaze over to Leapfight and Stoneheart, "Rest

reassured that if the nursery has a queen on the way we will move the rouge somewhere else."

Before Finchstar could dismiss the meeting Mallowtail stepped up, "Finchstar even though this rouge was stealing from us we should still get her name and not just call her, the *rouge."* Mallowtail suggested to which Finchstar nodded and turned to Hawk.

"What are you called flee pelt?" Finchstar asked with a lash of her ginger tail.

Hawks ears flattened as all eyes turned to her, some curious, some hostile. Hawk let out a huff and spoke in a shaky voice, "Hawk, my name is Hawk."

16 | meeting

3/28

L E A F

A frustrated snarl escapes my lips as I collapsed to my side. My limbs felt leady with exhaustion as my body struggles to comprehend anything that I was being taught. My mind seemed clogged with fog and strangling my mind process. The mere thought of the battle move Dawnsky taught me sent me spiraling to the ground.

I struggled to my paws and found Dawnsky towering over me with her eyes narrowed in anger. My ears flattened to my head as I saw her glaring at me. I already knew she would lash out at me—I mean that's the only thing she would do.

"Leafpaw!" She spat making me flinch at the seething rage of her words. No, not rage—weariness and tired from yelling at me. My pelt inflames with heat as shame slowly creeps up on me. I couldn't get anything right. It was frustrating because now it was mentally and emotionally draining on me.

For the past half moon, I couldn't keep up with anything. It was already a quarter moon ever since Hawk was captured and for the past quarter moon, I was struggling. Dawnsky seemed to understand my grief and me not being able to keep with my tasks and gave me more than enough time to heal and get better but it wasn't enough. And now, she would snap at me saying Willownose's death shouldn't be bothering me now and that I should push it away for the necessary battle training Finchstar has been ordering. But I still haven't moved on.

The simple thought aches my broken and unhealed heart so much that my body isn't able to keep up with the demand. And when my clan mates scold me for getting distracted it makes my blood boil.

It's like they care more about training rather than actually reaching out and try to see that I just need someone to cry out to. Someone to vent to. Someone who will silently listen and then comfort me. Is that too much to ask?

"Leafpaw!" Dawnsky snaps once again pulling me out of my thoughts. When I looked at Dawnsky she looked distressed. And once again my pelt began itching with embarrassment. "Great Starclan, Leafpaw what's wrong with you?" Dawnsky shakes her head. "We've been trying to go over this move since sunrise yet still you aren't able to it."

"I'm sorry," I mumbled. Dawnsky growled. "If you actually were wouldn't you put more effort then?"

I didn't answer instead I stare at the ground, my paw itching to whirl around and run through the forrest and far away from this place but my paws were planted to the ground. Dawnsky let out a weary sigh.

"Let's head back—there's no point in this anyways." She turned around and began to walk away leaving me guilt ridden but even so I couldn't find a way to make myself focus on my training. Unlike Silentpaw who was doing much better than I was—I couldn't help but feel envious. Unlike me, she found her comfort in making herself busy and useful. In fact, she seemed more *cheerier*.

Sighing, I got to my paws and walked after Dawnsky. We gently pelted through the forrest and slowed down once we came closer to the camp entrance. The two of us squeezed through and as soon as I entered the camp I wanted to sink to the floor.

Eyes turned toward my direction and the sudden attention made me uncomfortable. Especially knowing the disdain that was going to hurtle through my way. I lowered my head to the floor feeling hot waves of shame and embarrassment consuming me. And I wasn't lying when I said I felt horrible.

I turned around and was about to head toward the apprentice den when I felt a tail brush my shoulder and saw Dawnsky holding me back.

"Wha—"

"Leafpaw, look." Dawnsky paused and sighed. "It's not easy adjusting to everything, alright? But for the sake of you and for the sake of the clans you need to try harder. This is not the time to dwell because the rouges are not going to go easy on us."

She looked at me and I saw the same look in her eyes that ticked me off. Pity. I scowled and turned away, unable to answer her.

How does she know? I wondered.

"Leafpaw" Dawnsky called again. My shoulders sagged.

"Okay," I muttered and got up from my spot, heading to the apprentice den.

"I hope so," Dawnsky called and watched me leave, her expression filled with nothing but worry. I scrambled up the rock edges and slipped into the cool den before collapsing upon my nest. The nests beside me were empty which I was grateful for.

I didn't want to face Silentpaw at the moment and I already knew that meeting Blackpaw would be the most painful experience and that I would only end up screaming at the irksome cat. I rested my head on my paws and my tired body relaxed.

My eyes slowly drooped as I slowly began to doze off. As my senses faded off, I then remembered Thornpaw and the promise he made me do.

Meet me again, he said. I wondered if I would. But then I remembered him saying about just leaving all their problems behind and for once just relax. I just might. I mean today was the day after all.

* * *

The first thing I saw was the harsh sun rays that was peeking into the den. My eyes faltered at the sight and groaned from the heat and sight. The nests next to me were empty which was surprising since I expected the nests beside me to be occupied. I sat up in my

nest and yawned.

I licked my paws and drew them over my ears and cleaned my body. I felt refreshened. I got up from my nest ans trotted put of the den.

Outside the clan was hustling around. Near the fresh-kill pile was Stoneheart and Leapflight. The she-cat was mewing away—her eyes enlightened and bright as she talked. I remembered how she was a serious solemn cat before but now she seemed more open and relaxed. Stoneheart watched his mate with adoration glimmering in his eyes.

My heart twisted with happiness. It must've feel good to have someone to be there for you.

Honeywisp, Swiftleap, and Ravenwing were all sharing a huge eagle. They were all talking and seemed to be enjoying themseleves.

I skidded down the rocks and from the corner of my eyes I saw Silentpaw walking down from the fresh-kill pile with a thrush between her jaws. I watched as she made her way over to the nursery where the rouge, Hawk, was kept.

A frown etched my lips but I didn't mind too much of it. I turned around and headed over to the fresh-kill pile and took something for myself. As I did, I noticed the judgmental stares I received from my clan mates. My stomach fluttered nervously.

I picked up a robin and sat a few mouse-tail lengths away and started slowly eating. I suddenly missed the presence of Silentpaw and even missed her loudly talking. She would always make me feel wanted and comforted no matter what situations. As I took a bite, I heard footsteps approaching me and paused my eating. I turned my head and saw Honeywisp staring at me with a curious gaze.

"Um, is something wrong?" I asked anxiously, wondering whether my mentor was going to call me for training or hunting, or even worse—border patrol.

Honeywisp ignored my question and instead started talking. "I've

been watching you," she started and tilted her head. "You've been struggling, eh?"

I frowned. "So?"

Honeywisp narrowed her eyes at me and I quickly snapped my mouth shut.

Mousebrain! That's no way to talk to a warrior and let alone the fact she's super grumpy and has a sharp tongue!

However Honeywisp didn't snap at me instead she said something that startled me. "Are you alright?" She paused then shook her head. "What am I saying?"

Honeywisp sighed and sat down, wrapping her tail neatly around her paws.

"It's tough isn't it?" she murmured. "Everyone saying 'oh im so sorry for your loss, she walks in starclan now' as if that's suppose to make you feel better. They treat you with pity and act as if you'll be fine within a few days. But when you really struggle and you're filled with nothing but stress and burden, no one cares and only yells at you for your mistakes. And then all of their pity is gone—and they around saying 'you should be doing better by now, why are you struggling? this is more important' and you're left by yourself to deal with everything."

I stared at Honeywisp, my jaw dropping. She just summed all of my problems up. I shut my jaws and sighed.

"You know it so well," I muttered.

"Because I went through what you went through—I understand you, Leafpaw," Honeywisps said.

"But Finchstar is not dead." I frowned at the pale ginger she-cat.

"No but that doesn't mean our relationship isn't destroyed." Honeywisp scowled. "Anyways, I'm just here to say that if you need someone to be there for you, I'm here. You're so young to go through something like that and the fact that no one cares is

terrible."

"Really?" I whisper.

"Yep, I'm open anytime. And I'd think we'd be great friends so why not." Honeywisp let out a purr before waving her tail at me and hurrying over to where Swiftleap and Ravenwing were sitting. I blinked and then turned back to my robin. I continued eating but after what Honeywisp said, it made me feel more reassured.

I finished eating my robin and got up. I should find Dawnsky and perhaps make up for what I did. It's not worth it but then again I don't want to fall behind on my training.

I really should thank Honeywisp, I thought. *Her words meant so much to me.*

* * *

"Amazing Leafpaw!" Dawnsky exclaimed as I neatly leaped to the ground beside her. The leaves above me rustled and a few fell down as a breeze flew by. I let out a purr at Dawnsky's compliment.

When I asked Dawnsky about extra training, she decided we do some tree climbing exercise. While I wasnt perfect, I did much better than I hoped and that alone was enough to please Dawnsky. Though I did accidentally wrench my claw during the round.

Don't blame me, it was the dumb wind. Luckily it wasn't anything serious. My paw felt sore from the climbing and my legs felt leady from all the jumping I did.

"I did my best," I admit. Dawnsky gave me an approving nod.

"That's good enough," she said. "Anyways I think we should stop for the day. It's getting late and you must be exhausted."

I let out a nod as Dawnsky turned around and began heading towards the clan camp. I felt relieved knowing that I have redeemed myself. I still would have to work harder—its not like the days work is gone. But, like I said, it felt good.

Once we arrived at the camp Dawnsky told me to head to the medicine cat den and get my paws healed. I obliged and limped toward the den. As I neared at the mouth of the cave, my head poked into the dark edge and looked around. The den smelled strongly of herbs. However as I looked around, Parsleyseed was no where to be seen.

"Um, can I help you Leafpaw?" A voice called out from the depths of the shadows. I flinched from the sudden voice and quickly snapped my head toward that direction. A cat walked out from the pitch black edges—Ivypaw.

"Oh, sorry I didn't know you were here," I quickly say and immediately took a step back. The black and silver she-cat looked surprised.

"Are you injured?" She asked anxiously. I nodded and lifted up my injured paw. "I wrenched it during training."

"Oh. Hold on, I have something for it." Ivypaw turns around and walked over to the cracks of the caves where the herbs were stored. She nosed through the piles and pulled out an odd looking root. She came over to me and dropped it by my paws.

"Comfrey root. Good for wrenched claws and sore pads."

Ivypaw bent down and began chewing on the root. She spat it out onto a leaf and scooped the green poultice and smeared it over my claws and pads. I stiffened from the touch but then relaxed as I felt the effect of the herb.

"It feels better already," I mewed. "Thanks."

Ivypaw licked her paw and let out a purr. "I'm glad it worked but that doesn't mean your paws are healed. Come back tomorrow for another poultice."

"Yes O wise one," I joked. Ivypaw let out a small *mrrow* of laughter.

"So hows being the medicine cats apprentice?" I asked the silver and black she-cat.

Ivpaw's eyes lit up at my question. "I love it and I'm really glad I chose this path. It's so much better to help those cats in need and its that feeling that you know you can help them and that striving towards to learning and doing is what makes being a medicine cat amazing."

"Thats good to hear," I meowed.

"Though Blackpaw's not happy with it, " Ivypaw muttered and looked at her paws.

I growled at the mention of his name. "He's not the boss of you so why should you care on what he thinks?"

"He's my brother—"

"But not a good one," I snapped. "Siblings are suppose to respect and understand one another. He's clearly blind as a bat to not see how much being a medicine cat means to you. And you know what? You nailed him perfectly by telling him you didn't want to be a warrior. You're strong and amazing for not letting his snarky comments ruin what you truly want to be."

Ivypaw stared at me, her eyes wide. "You really think so?"

"I know so," I mewed firmly. I then turned around. "I have to go. It was nice talking with you."

Ivypaw stared at me before nodding slowly. "And to you too."

I ducked out of the den and looked around the camp. The night was a black sky with a half moon as the only source of light. The camp has gotten quiet but I didn't want to risk getting caught so I herded myself toward the apprentice den. As I slipped into the small den and planted myself into my nest, I saw Blackpaw deep asleep. However, Silentpaw's nest was empty which surprised me.

Where is that flat eared furball? I wondered as I sank into my nest. I sighed. *Maybe she's in a night time border patrol.*

I closed my eyes but I was unable to sleep as excitement washed over me. My heart was beating on my chest softly but it felt like it

was going to burst through my chest.

Calm down heart its just a dumb meeting. It could even be a trick, I told myself. But even so I knew that Thornpaw wasn't lying. I knew that he probably meant every word.

After what it seems like moons, I slowly rose from my nest and slipped out of the den and made sure Blackpaw didn't wake up. I stayed within the shadows and made sure that no warriors were nearby that could catch me. I remembered the small hole that I once found with Silentpaw when we were younger and decided to use that to sneak out of the camp.

As I neared the small entrance, the size looked smaller than I last saw. Or I must've gotten bigger. Not minding it much, I pried the side with my paws and squeezed my way through. I let out a hiss of annoyance as I felt sharp twigs and thorns snag my pelt. I grunt and push out my hind legs.

I needed to get out fast before someone finds me here. With a final push of my hind legs, I crashed into the cool grass. I sat up and shook out my ruffled fur. I gave my chest a few licks before hurrying over to the small hole. From here, I could already smell the strong scent that could give me away

I turned around and quickly grabbed a few leaves nearby and rubbed them all over my scent—masking it with a sweet musky smell. After sniffing to make sure no scent was left, I turned around and began making my way over to the Shadowclan border.

My paws soon turned into swift running. The rush of the cool wind flashed by my fur as I streaked through the woods. My paws flew across the ground as I ran. And ran and ran.

I didn't know why but just streaking through the woods was so comforting. The night was cold but running made my blood pump and warmed my body. I gasped with delight as branches and brambles brushed passed me. My flew fluttered as the wind flickered them. I never felt so relaxed before.

After running for a while, I then skidded to a stop as I caught a

strong scent. I was at the shadowclan border. I slowed down and stopped where I was, making sure I didn't cross the border. I looked around hoping to catch a glimpse of Thornpaw but he was nowhere to be seen.

Under the stench of both the Skyclan and Shadowclan scent, catching Thornpaw's scent would be difficult. I frowned and sat down.

Am I in the wrong place? I thought anxiously. My fur then prickled uneasily. *What if it's a trap? What if he was trying to lure me here and I fell for it?*

Panic settled through me as my thoughts wandered. I was about to get up and leave the place when I heard rustling. I turned around and saw a shadow slinking closer to me. The movement stopped when it saw me and I was sure I was in trouble until—

"Leafpaw?"

The shadows got closer until a dark brown tom appeared in front of me. He looked shocked when he saw me standing there with my fur out and ears flat. His eyes then softened and lifted his chin. My shoulders eased and I let out a sigh of relief.

"I thought it was someone else," I tell him.

Thornpaw snorted. "You thought I was playing a joke?"

"Can you blame me?"

Thornpaw shook his head and then tilted his head down to stare at me. "Well now that we're here, ready to have some fun?"

I felt blood rush through my body filling me with eagerness and excitement. "I don't see why not."

17 | moon cave

a/n: this chapter is going to switch to 3rd person at some point, I will say when it does.

(long chapter ahead)

—

3/30

S I L E N T

The cool breeze of leaf-bare swept through the clearing as I made my way over to the fresh kill pile. My mouth watered at the scent of a plum vole laid out at the top of the pile.

My height has increased over the past few moons and I'm now a bit over half of Mouseclaws height, making me the tallest apprentice.

I plucked the vole from the fresh kill pile and stretched my gaze across the camp. The dawn patrol had already left camp so not many cats were up yet, not even Finchstar.

I looked towards the top of the rockslide path to see Mallowtail pushing his way though Finchstars den slowly followed up Dawnsky.

What are they up to? I wonder but shook off the thought as my eyes traveled to the nursery. Hawk has been Skyclans prisoner for 8 sunrises now and my worry for when Finchstar will allow the rouge to leave has increased.

I know I could use my friendship with Hawk to get information about the rouges but- I stopped my thought and shook away my worries. *Stop it Silentpaw, Hawk is the enemy, she's part of the rouges! And the rouges are the ones who killed Willownose.*

Grief for my mother swelled in my chest but I brushed it off with a huff and carried my vole to the nursery.

I stopped at the nursery entrance and let out a sigh, *Hawk is the enemy. If I can get some information out of her it can help the clan, its like in the worry code, you can't make friends outside of your clan and this is the same thing.* My thought were interrupted by a friendly purr coming from the inside of the nursery.

"Silentpaw," The voice called, "don't be shy come in!" I pushed my way though the nursery entrance and found Hawk in the back of the den stretched out on her back as if she wasn't in a camp full of cats who would claw off her pelt if she stepped one claw out of line.

The calico purred as I came into view, her gaze fell on the vole in my jaws, Hawks tail twitched eagerly, "You always spoil me." The rouge teased and I gave her a eye role.

I stalked closer to Hawks rest and laid down with the vole in front of me. "Tell me," I started taking a bite of the vole. "do you find the clans way of life different now that you've been with us for a few days?" I questioned expecting a silly answer but Hawk looked at me thoughtfully.

"To be honest, the way you clan cats live is interesting." Hawk began taking her first bite of the vole. "Its, comforting? I guess, I've never seen cats care for each other the way you and your clanmates do. Makes me wish the rouges were like that." Hawk admitted and I stared at her for a few seconds.

The question of kin had never been brought up between up and now I feel bad for dumping my problems on Hawk and Hawk not opening up about hers. My gaze shifted to the ground as Hawk took another bite of the vole.

"Don't you have kin with the rouges?" I asked and saw Hawk stiffen at the question, "I have a sibling." Hawk said pushing the vole to me.

I could tell the rouge didn't want to talk more about her kin so I dropped it.

After finishing the plum vole Hawk sat up in her nest and was about to stretch when she flinched back down, "Something wrong?" I

mewed concerned, "I'm fine," Hawk answered looking at her leg, "I just need to clean this wound a bit." Hawk mewed and started licking the dry blood from the wound she got the day Mallowtail and I found her.

My eyes grew wide, *Mallowtail didn't tell Parsleyseed to check on Hawks wounds?* I watched the she-cat lick at her wounds for a few minutes before going to her side to look myself.

I'm not the most educated cat when it comes to herbs or wounds but any cat could tell Hawks injury was becoming infected. *We can't let the prisoner die on us.*

"Come on, I'll take you to our med cat." I mewed helping Hawk out of her nest, Hawk let out a hiss of pain but managed to stand straight. "Won't your clanmates be mad if they see you with me?" Hawk mewed.

"They wouldn't be happy if their prisoner died on their watch," I explained helping Hawk to the nursery entrance, "and I couldn't sit here and watch you suffer." I saw Hawk smirk as we made our way our of the nursery entrance.

Hawks eyes widened at the sight of the rockslide path and I realized non Skyclan cats were not used to living in such high places or homes that were this steep.

"Don't worry," I mewed to Hawk at her hesitation, "the rockslide path is completely safe." I said giving Hawk a smile before starting to trot down the Rockslide path.

Few cats were already in the clearing and most of them sent Hawk glares as we walked past. Blackpaw being one of them.

The apprentice shot up and ran over to us meeting us half way down the rockslide path. "How dare you let this flee pelt out of its prison!?!" Blackpaw hissed raising his hackles, I glared at the apprentice before replying. "The rouge is injured and her wounds are bad, if Parsleyseed does not look at her wounds they could get infected." I explained coolly.

Blackpaw was not up for my mews and unsheathed his claws, "So what if the rouge gets a infection?!? All rouges deserve a painful death!" Blackpaw yowled and Hawks tail lashed at my side.

I was about to push the kit-apprentice out of my way when a deep voice came from behind us, "Blackpaw you shouldn't be close minded." The voice huffed and I turned to see Mallowtail with Finchstar, Ravenwing, and Dawnsky behind him.

"Yes, we can't have our guest suffer, we are not fox hearts." Finchstar said while padding to my side. "Take the rouge to Parsleyseed Silentpaw and after I want you to get Leafpaw there is something important we must discuss. Come with us to my den Blackpaw." Finchstar said and turned back around to go back to her den.

Blackpaw looked stunned but followed with his head down, I could see his tail bristling and his claws still unsheathed but he didn't turn back to me and Hawk.

At the med den Parsleyseed was chewing up some herbs while Ivypaw was furthering back in the den sorting from weird smellings herbs.

"Parsleyseed!" I called to the white tom. Parsleyseed picked up his head and his eyes narrowed at the sight of Hawk. "Why have you brought that rouge in my den?!?" He hissed but then Ivypaw came running over.

"Parsleyseed Hawk looks to be hurt, I can treat her if you don't want to." Ivypaw mewed starting to make her way to look at Hawks injuries.

Parsleyseed let out a huff of annoyance before going back to his herbs. Ivypaw helped me guide Hawk to a nest then ran to the herb store.

Ivypaw came back with some cobwebs and started asking questions as she sniffed at the wound, "How did you get hurt Hawk? These wounds look and smell to be a few days old." Ivypaw mewed.

"I got them the day I came here, thorns and me are not friends." Hawk joked, both me and Ivypaw let out *mrrows* of laughter. I watched Ivypaw treat Hawks wound for a few more minutes before a voice rang through the camp, "Silentpaw!" I heard Mouseclaw yowl. I gave Hawk a nod before leaving the med den.

Outside Leafpaw and Mouseclaw stood waiting for me, Leafpaw was almost prancing in excitement. "What's wrong?" I asked watching Leafpaw settle down still looking like she was bursting with energy.

"Your mentors have spoken to Finchstar and they have decided its time for the apprentice to-" Mouseclaw was about to say but Leafpaw cut him off by yowling the rest, "Were all going to the Moon Cave!" Leafpaw yowled jumping up and down.

"What?!? The Moon Cave?!? Already?!?" I mewed and now matched Leafpaws excitement. Mouseclaw laughed at us before speaking, "Yes, I will be going also with Finchstar, Dawnsky, Ravenwing, and Blackpaw." Mouseclaw finished.

"What about Mallowtail?" I asked but felt a flick of a bushy tail across my flat ear, "I'll be staying here, you never know when the rouges will attack again." Mallowtail answered his gaze shifting to the med cat den for a few seconds.

"When are we leaving?!?" Leafpaw asked while stalking to my side and I realized the two of us had not spoken in a few days. I had been so busy with Hawk I'd forgotten about my sister..

"At sun high." Mallowtail answered looking towards the sun, "You two start going to parsleyseed to get your traveling herbs, and Silentpaw make sure that rouge is back in the nursery before we leave."

Parsleyseed suddenly pushed through the med den and dropped some herbs in front of me and Leafpaw, "You flees are talking louder then Starclan, take your herbs then get that flee pelt rouge out of my den!" The old med cat hissed before stalking over to the fresh kill pile.

I gave Leafpaw a flick with my tail before gulping down the herbs,

"Bitter." I mewed watching Leafpaw choke down her herbs.

My ears perked at talking coming from the med den and I quickly turned to Leafpaw, "I need to get Hawk back to the nursery, I'll be right back." I mewed standing up and stalking into the med den.

When I walked back into the med den I noticed Ivypaw and Hawk talking while Ivypaw was getting closer and closer to Hawk side. *Should I leave them alone? Maybe I should Hawks probably tried of only talking to me.*

I was about to leave the med den when Parsleyseed pushed through the den entrance causing me to be pushed back into the den. I looked at Parsleyseed annoyed when I noticed the med cat was just staring at me his eyes show nothing.

My pelt bristled when the old tom parted his jaws and spoke in a deep, mysterious tone, "A single decision can change anyone's life. Which one of you should be by her side." The tom mewed. I was about to say something when Parsleyseed pushed past me and strolled over to his herb store.

What in Starclan was that? Did he have a vision about Hawk? and what does he mean by 'a single decision can change anyone's life. Which one of you should be by her side?'

Does he mean if I walk away from Hawk and Ivypaw? I let out a huff and trotted over to Hawk and Ivypaw, "Hawk how is your leg?" I mewed and noticed Hawks eye light up at the sight of me.

"Its good," The rouge started and was cut off by a yawn. Ivypaw gaze Hawk a eye roll before turning to me, "I gave Hawk some poppy seeds and put some Marigold for the infection." Ivypaw explained before turning to the drowsy Hawk, "Come back to the medicine den every day for a check up and come anytime you want!" Ivypaw said with a wave of her tail before returning to the herb store.

I got to hawks side to help her up when I noticed Parsleyseed staring at me with narrowed eyes, the glare of the medicine cat made my pelt bristle.

Hawk sensed me being uneasy and we both quickly made our way out of the med den.

As we exited the med den Leafpaw came to my side and whispered into my ear so Hawk could not hear, "So your the rouges baby sitter now?" Leafpaw teased and I gave my sister a friendly eye roll.

I flicked my tail telling Leafpaw I would be right back and hurried to help Hawk back to the nursery. The calico flopped down onto the moss nest, her eyes were half open.

I purred before turning to the nursery entrance. I was about to leave when Hawk called from her nest, "Come back to me later." The she-cat whispered before falling into a deep slumber. Heat rushed to my face as I hurried out of the nursery.

* * *

"Apprentices!" Finchstars voice boomed from the clearing below, "Its time to go!" The nests around me rustled as Blackpaw and Leafpaw started to awake from their short sleeps.

Our mentors advised us to get some sleep before our trip to the Moon Cave and I would have if my mind was not always running back to Parsleyseeds vision and what Hawk said. Finally getting up with a yawn and a stretch I hurried out of the apprentices den to meet Leafpaw who was already half way down the rockslide path.

"You didn't sleep at all did you?" Leafpaws question snapped me from my thoughts, "No, not really." I answered turning my gaze towards the end of the rockslide path. Leafpaw gave me a concerned look, "You were fine until you went to bring that rouge back to her nest. Wait, did she do something to you?!?" Leafpaw hissed digging her claws into the earth.

"If that flee pelt even looks at you again I will rip her pelt off—" I cut Leafpaw off, "No! Hawk didn't do anything, I'm just wondering about the rouges." I mewed and was about to rush ahead of Leafpaw when she followed with another question, "Are you going to use your friendship with the rouge for information?"

Leafpaws questioned made me stop in my paw steps. *Should I use Hawk for information? The clans need information about the rouges in order to defeat them and Hawk could give us that information. But I'm not just using Hawk for information, I do want her as my friend, she has helped me through so much and I can't betray her.*

"Silentpaw? Silentpaw!" A voice yowled and snapped me back to the present where I saw Leafpaw staring at me from the bottom of the rockslide path. "I'm coming." I mewed running ahead of Leafpaw to Mouseclaws side.

Mouseclaw turned to me and Leafpaw, "Are you two ready?" He asked and I could see the pride in his eyes. "Yes!" Me and Leafpaw said at the same time.

I sat down by the thorn barrier entrance and turned to the part of the patrol that was here already, Finchstar was talking quietly with Mallowtail over by the medicine cat den while Dawnsky hurried down the rockslide path to join the group.

Blackpaw and Ravenwing were talking on the other end of the thorn barrier and I could see them both casting glares towards Hawks "prison."

"You never answered my question." Leafpaw mewed settling down next to me, "Are you going to use your friendship with Hawk to get information about the rouges?" Leafpaw asked again and I shifted uneasy.

"I'm not friends with the rouge Leafpaw, I'm just trying to see if I can get the name of the cat who killed Willownose." I mewed turning away from Leafpaw, I felt Leafpaw stiffen and I knew she was still coping with the death of our mother as I was.

The tension in the air was broken from a yowl, "Apprentices! Mentors! Its time to go!" Finchstar yowled while trotting over to the group with Mallowtail at her side.

Me and Leafpaws tension now forgotten while we both jumped up and squealed in excitement. Mallowtail let out a mrrow of laughter before trotting to my side, "Some cat needs to stay here in camp

while Finchstar is away so you listen to-" Mallowtail tried to explain but I cut him off, "Listen to your senior warriors and your leader, I get it." I huffed and Mallowtail gave my folded ear a flick with his tail.

"We need some cat to stay here, you never know when the rouges will attack again." Finchstar cut in sending a glance towards the nursery.

Something sparked in Finchstars eyes and she gave Mallowtail I nod before flicking her tail for the group to gather, most of the clan was already outside of their dens watching as the group was about to leave.

Ivypaw ran out of the medicine cat den and pushed her cheek against Blackpaw, "Your going to love it at the Moon Cave!" Ivypaw mewed happily but Blackpaw pushed her away, "I don't call weak medicine cats my kin, Ivypaw." Blackpaw hissed before stalking over to Ravenwing.

None of the older warriors noticed the little argument but me and Leafpaw did. Leafpaw sat down at Ivypaws side and sent Blackpaw a glare making the apprentice look away.

Jealousy still burned under my pelt but Ivypaw had done nothing wrong, I stalked over to Ivypaws other side and gave the younger apprentice a nudge on the shoulder telling her to cheer up.

Parsleyseed came trotting out of the medicine cat den and whispered something in Finchstars ear and both of them turning to me with narrowed eyes, *Great Starclan...*

"Lets go now, we want to make it to the Moon cave before moon high." Finchstar called and waiting as the patrol gathered.

Finchstar stood tall in the front of the patrol with me, Leafpaw, and Blackpaw a bit behind her. Dawnsky and Ravenwing put themselves as walls behinds us apprentices while Mouseclaw was at the rear.

The clan then surrounded the patrol to say their good byes and good lucks when I looked towards the nursery and spotted Hawk

staring down at the patrol, the calico and me locked eyes and Hawk sent a friendly wave of her tail before Cloudfur hissed at Hawk and forced Hawk back into the nursery.

* * *

The beginning of evening air was warm as the sun laid rays across our pelts on patrol.

Mouseclaw wanted to tell me and Leafpaw more about the Moon Cave and the Mountain Range before we got there, "There path is right at the end of The Silver Pelt river by Shadowclan territory." Mouseclaw mewed and I saw Leafpaws ears perk up.

"Won't Shadowclan be mad if we cross their territory?" Leafpaw asked to which Finchstar answered, "All the clans have a agreement that if your territory is in another clans way to the Moon Cave you must allow them to pass through your territory, no matter what." Finchstar answered and all the apprentices nodded.

"And what happens if we meet a Shadowclan patrol? What if they try to force us out of their territory so we can't go to the Moon Cave?" Blackpaw asked and Dawnsky answered, "It should be against the warrior code for a clan to deny another clan access to the Moon Cave! But so far nothing has come up for one clan to deny another." Dawnsky explained and Blackpaw let out a huff.

Leafpaw broke the sudden awkward silence, "What does the Moon Cave look like?" She asked curiously.

"The Moon Cave is a cave that is hidden behind The Silver Pelt Water Fall, in order to find The Silver Pelt Water Fall you have to follow the Silver Pelt River and soon it will lead to the water fall." Mouseclaw explained and I started trying to imagine what the Silver Pelt Water Fall looks like.

The forest started to dense and I could feel tiny pine needles under my paw pads which told me that we were nearing the Shadowclan border.

The stench of the Shadowclan filled my mouth and nose as we

neared, but before we could cross the border Finchstar flicked her tail for me to come forward.

I exchanged a surprised glance with Leafpaw before trotting to Finchstars side. The ginger she-cat didn't say anything as we crossed the border and trotted through Shadowclans territory.

The scent of Shadowclan was everywhere, my ears were perked and pelt bristled at every sound and scent.

My ears perked at the sound of rushing water, *We must be getting close to the edge of the Silver pelt river!* I thought excitedly while nearly tripping over some tree root because of my prancing paws.

"Excited aren't you?" Finchstars sudden mew made me slightly jump, "Y-yeah! I've never been past the border before." I mewed tasting the air which was full of Shadowclan scent but also a hint of prey in the shady under growth.

"I'd hope not." Finchstar mewed and remained silent for a few moments before speaking again, "Silentpaw, I've seen how much interest you take in our prisioner." Finchstar mewed quietly for the rest of the patrol not to hear.

"And I wanted to know if Hawk trusts you enough to share information of the rouges." Finchstar mewed turning her gaze to meet mine, "I know your only a apprentice, but the clans need as much information about these rouges as possible. We need to know their numbers, who their leader is if they have one, where their camp is, and why they are attacking the Mountain Range Clans." Finchstar explained.

"I don't expect you to get that much information but just a few mouth full's." Finchstar mewed and awaited my answer.

My pelt prickled and ears burned while my mouth went dry. *Hawk is my friend?!? I can't betray a friend, but Skyclan is my home, where all my kin is.*

I turned my head to look behind the patrol at Mouseclaw and Leafpaw who were chatting like birds about the Moon Cave, *Will*

Finchstar make me leave Skyclan if I don't give her any information? Would she really do that?

I shook my head. *Of course not you flat eared mouse brain! Finchstar is a trustworthy leader, I will always trust my leader. But could I really betray Hawk after all she has done for me? After so much she's helped me with?*

'Think of your clan..' It seemed the slight breeze whispered, *I will always put my clan and clanmates first!*

"Of course Finchstar! I'd love to get some information out of that flee pelt." I lied straight biting my tongue and lashing my tail.

Finchstar Smiled down at me, "I'm glad you made the right choice." The leader said before flicking her tail for me to get back to the rest of the patrol.

I slowed down my pace and now walked side by side with Leafpaw who was eyeing me curiously, "What did Finchstar want from you?" Leafpaw asked and I could see Mouseclaws ears perk at the question.

"Finchstar wants to me befriend the rouge and try to get some information about the rouges clan out of them." I told Leafpaw whiched turned her more curious, "But why you? Why not a warrior?" She wondered.

"Finchstar says she saw how much interest I have in our rouge friend and she thinks I can help get information out of Hawk!" I told Leafpaw and faked proudly fluffed out my chest.

Leafpaw narrowed her eyes at me before continuing our trip towards the Silver Pelt Water Fall.

* * *

I pushed through the thicket to be met with a small narrow clearing just on the bank of The Silver Pelt River. I was admiring the clear blue water when Finchstar voice snapped me out of it, "Apprentices, if you look forward down the bank you can see the trail we will be following in order to climb the Mountain Range." Finchstar called

and I pushed past Ravenwing who returned with a hiss of annoyance.

I looked down the bank and just on the side of the Silver Pelt River was a rocky trail leading up a steep slope. The slope was narrow and when I looked all the way up the trail I realized the trail was much, much higher then the Rockslide path in Skyclan camp.

Leafpaw stared in awe and I could see excitement in her gaze, "Wow! The Silver Pelt River cuts straight through the Mountain!" Leafpaw yelped in awe and Mouseclaw let out a mrrow of laughter.

"Yes, The river cuts straight though the Mountain but the bank there is very dangerous as is the rushing waves." Mouseclaw explained and I noticed the increase of waves in the sky blue water.

"That's why we have to climb that steep slope?" Blackpaw asked his mentor who nodded.

"We rest here for now, the climb up the slope and the rest of the way to the Moon Cave will be rough." Finchstar mewed while laying down on the soft grass.

"But won't Shadowclan be mad? We are still in their territory." I mewed to which got a answer from Dawnsky, "All the clans have agreement that when a patrol visits the Moon Cave they are allowed rest before they start to make their way up the slope. Yes this is Shadowclan territory but this stretch of land we sit is mutual ground for Thunderclan, Skyclan, and Shadowclan. While on the other side of the river," Dawnsky pointed with her tail towards a similar stretch of land on the other side of the Silver Pelt river, this land also had a steep slope to get to the top of the Mountain Range. "that land is for Windclan and Riverclan." Dawnsky finished and I nodded in understanding.

So many things to the Mountain Range, will I need to do anything more when we get to the Moon Cave? Will we see Starclan? Maybe even Willownose? The questions of what we will find at the Moon Cave remained on my mind until Finchstar told us it was time to start heading up the slope.

"Apprentice stay close to your mentors sides." Finchstar mewed before taking the first steps up the slope, I watched, puzzled, of what I should do for a few moments before Mouseclaw nudged my shoulder, "Stick with me." My father told me and I latched myself to his side.

Blackpaw and Ravenwing pushed past Dawnsky and Leafpaw and followed Finchstar up the slope.

My ears twitched nervously as I noticed how rocky and steep the path was. *May Starclan guide us all.* I thought shifting in my paws as me and Mouseclaw took the first few steps up the slope.

The sharp rocks against my paw pads were nothing different because the rock slide path made Skyclan cats paw pads rough.

Mouseclaw stayed side by side to me as we followed Dawnsky and Leafpaw up the slope.

The path was twisty and uneven, my paws kept slipping and sliding to the side because of it. Mouseclaw kept a firm tail wrapped around my torso just as Dawnsky and Ravenwing did with Leafpaw and Blackpaw.

Finchstar trotted swiftly up the slope as if she'd climbed this slope her whole life.

I looked up my side and I saw the steep cliff edge that ran at the side of the slope, just at the bottom was the rushing waves of the Silver Pelt river. The water was fiercest I'd ever seen, splashing against the sides and carry small stinks and logs that ended up either breaking or getting submerged under the waves.

I wonder if any cat has ever fallen down there, would they survive? Just then a huge wave splashed against the mountain side causing a huge rock to fall in. The sound of the splash made me latch myself closer to Mouseclaw.

Finchstar twitched her tail and the patrol came to a stop, I looked behind me at the path and Just then did I realize how far up the mountain we were. "We are almost to the top, and I want to warn

the apprentices that we part of the slope is the hardest to climb so step your paws lightly." Finchstar mewed sternly before continuing her way up.

Mouseclaw gave me a reassure look before patting on, Leafpaw turned her head to look at me and I gave my sister a smile to which she returned.

The upcoming slope was extra rocky and I could feel the rocks stabbing into my paw pads.

Peering past Leafpaw I could see the very top of the slope, my paws twitched to be rid of these rocks. I could tell Blackpaw felt the same as the apprentice was hissing under his breath everytime a took a step.

Finchstar seemed unbothered by the rocks and continued to push herself to the top of the slope. Leafpaw was slightly zigzagging past the rocks while Dawnsky simply took them like a warrior.

Ravenwing was stepping lightly but also hissing under his breath like Blackpaw, *Finchstar made a good choice putting 2 hot heads as apprentice and mentor.*

I looked to myside to see Mouseclaw staring blankly ahead while her tail twitched around my torso, "Mouseclaw are you ok?" I asked my father to which he turned to face me. "I'm fine, just wondering what we will see at the Moon Cave." Mouseclaw answered before turning his head to me with a fake smile.

"What do you hope to see when you share with Starclan?" He asked, I hesitated for a few moments, *What do I hope to see?* I wondered.

"What could I see?" I asked curiously, to which Mouseclaw purred, "Anything, but you still most likely get to talk to a Starclan cat. That's only what I've heard cats see." Mouseclaw explained with a twitch of his ear.

My eyes let up at the thought of meeting a Starclan cat, but then a question popped in my head, "Could I see Willownose?!?" I asked quickly and Mouseclaw let out a raspy purr and a nod.

The tension on my shoulders lifted at the thought of being able to talk to Willownose again and I twitched my tail and ears in excitement.

Leafpaw and the others were getting a little bit ahead of us so I quickened my pace and as I reached right behind Leafpaw I nipped at her tail. Leafpaw squeaked and flashed her gaze towards me, "What do you hope to see at the Moon Cave?" I asked Leafpaw to which her gaze turned from annoyed to curious.

"I'm not sure, I don't really know what we could see." Leafpaws mewed and Dawnsky entered the conversation, "You could see a Starclan cat or I've heard some cats get warnings about their future." Dawnsky mewed and Leafpaws eyes grew wide.

"So we could see Willownose?!?" Leafpaw asked and Dawnsky nodded. Me and Leafpaw both shared a look of excitement before Blackpaw butted into the conversation, "I bet I will see the last leader of Skyclan telling me I'm destined to lead Skyclan one day!" Blackpaw mewed and buffed out his chest.

"As if!" I hissed at Blackpaw, "Mallowtail will pick when he is leader and I bet a whole leaders 9 lives of dawn patrols it won't be you!" Blackpaw rolled his eyes, "What, do you think he'll pick you? Just because your his apprentice?" Blackpaw sneered and I rolled my eyes, "Leadership is not for every cat and NOT for me!" I snarled.

I'd heard from the elders and Mallowtail that being leader was not for every cat and how much responsibility it is. I want to Fight, hunt, patrol, and defend my clan for a warriors whole life and not be stuck in my den all day and having to decide everything for my clan and hope they all agree to my decisions.

"I want to fight and hunt for my clan, not be stuck in my den all day and night having to stress over some stupid rouges or some mouse brained border disputes!" I yowled at Blackpaw who slashed his tail at me.

Finchstar and the warriors all heard me and Blackpaw little argument and Mouseclaw gave me a nod of approval, Ravenwing had slapped Blackpaw with his tail while Dawnsky gave me a smile.

Finchstar had only turned her cold gaze to me and Blackpaw which made me realize how tired the ginger she-cat looked, her old age had started to catch up because of the stress about the rouges.

A stressed leader is not good for any clan. I knew now that I needed to share some information about the rouges with Finchstar as soon as possible, I didn't want our leader to stress when we have a rouge full of imformation in our own camp.

Finally after some time the slope came to a end we and stood at the very top of the steep slope. "We're so high!" I gasped and Leafpaw ran to my side to see, "wow.." She mewed.

The warriors were all gathered together talking quietly while Blackpaw perked his ears trying to listen but kept getting glares from Ravenwing.

Finchstar pushed away from the others and stood in between the apprentices and warriors, "We must move the rest of the way quickly, the sun won't be out for much longer." Finchstar mewed and started following the canyon that the Silver Pelt river lay.

I looked over the edge and saw that water moving faster and faster, the way down was still very steep. Mouseclaw padded to my side while Leafpaw followed, "We're almost there." He mewed before running to catch up with the others.

Me and Leafpaw followed with the same strides, Leafpaw was looking curiously over the edge, "How big do you think the Moon Cave will be?" She asked and I shrugged, "I don't really care how big it is, I just hope we will see Willownose." I mewed and following Leafpaws gaze that was staring directly at a small vole that was hanging on for dear life just above the rushing water.

"Poor thing would have been tasty." Leafpaw said licking her lips, the vole was plump and its weight was making it slip further and further down the slope and closer to the water.

Leafpaw and me stopped to watch as it tried to claw its way up the slope but to no avail. I suddenly heard slight squeaking, I turned my head to see some more voles running around a burrow squeaking

franticly. The voles didn't look to be a moon old yet.

"Their looking for their mother." I mewed softly to Leafpaw, *The falling vole must have been looking for food and fell down the canyon.*

Out of the corner of my eye I saw a big bush of berries awaiting to be eaten by a land creature, with a sigh of defeat I trotted over and plucked off some stems. Leafpaw nodded as I stalked over to the baby voles and softly pushed the steps towards them.

The voles sniffed out the berries in a instant and hurried over to eat them.

I watched the baby voles eat with a soft smile, one of happness and saddness. Leafpaw walked over her ears were flat. "The mom fell in, If only she would have seen these berries before trying to go for the ones in the canyon." Leafpaw mewed softly.

I smelt the scent of another vole and realized one of the baby voles was strollling closer and closer to the canyon, *Must be following its mothers scent.* I thought and was about to try to lead the vole to the stems with its siblings when a black pelt leaped from the bushes and landed on top of the baby vole, killing it with a swift bite to the neck.

"Blackpaw!" I snarled at the apprentice, Blackpaw turned his narrowed eyes to me, "What? Are you two feeding prey now? Are you going to turn into herb eaters?" Blackpaw taunted and I was about to slash my claws across the apprentices muzzle when Mouseclaw pushed into the clearing, "Hurry up you three!" He snapped before disappearing into the under growth.

Blackpaw rolled his eyes, "That warrior needs to shut his muzzle." "Watch your mouth!" I snarled at Blackpaw and Leafpaw stood at my side with her claws unsheathed, "Mouseclaw is a better cat then you will ever be!" Leafpaw hissed and Blackpaw backed away.

"Fine," The apprentice then smirked before throwing the baby vole he killed into the canyon, "It can be with its mother." He snarled before rushing out of the clearing.

"Fox-hearted kit!" I snarled before stalking out of the clearing, Leafpaw followed.

Finchstar, Mouseclaw, Ravenwing, Dawnsky, and Blackpaw all stood at another dropped down path and I sighed. "This is the last trail if you look you can be the edge of the Silver Pelt water fall." Finchstar mewed and I quickened my pace.

We started our way down the slope, Mouseclaw had his tail around my torso as before but we were right behind Finchstar who nearly ran down the slope.

The path down the slope was much quicker because Finchstar had insisted on running the whole way down and now we stood in a large valley.

The Silver Pelt river was no longer in a canyon but now was level to level with the grass. And just a few paw steps away was the drop down of the Silver Pelt water fall. Me, Leafpaw, and Blackpaw all ran to the edge of the Water fall to peer down but all we saw was the water falling down. Nothing looked special about this place.

"Where's the Moon Cave?" Blackpaw asked to which Finchstar waved us over to her. The ginger she-cat was standing at the edge a little ways away from the water fall.

"This is the path that leads down wards the Moon Cave." Finchstar mewed before giving the warriors a look to which they all made a line.

"The path is very narrow so always have your pelt against the rocks, never walk too fast or slow." Finchstar warned before starting to stalk down the path.

Me and Leafpaw shared a nervous look before getting into the line. Finchstar was first, then Blackpaw, Leafpaw, me, Dawnsky, Ravenwing, and finally Mouseclaw at the rear. I kept myself close to Leafpaws tail in case one of us fell and slowed into pace with the patrol.

Finchstar was leading with confident strides while the rest of the

patrol latched themselves to the wall not daring to look down.

The sound of the water fall echoed and screamed into my ears as we got closer and closer to the cave entrance.

Finally, we all made it to the cave entrance. The sun was still beaming its golden rays so Finchstar decided we would stay outside the Moon Cave until moon high and we all agreed.

Me and Leafpaw laid side by side away from the others talking quietly, "You seem tired, stayed up late chasing your own tail?" I asked and got a swipe around the ear by Leafpaws sheathed paw.

"No you mouse brain, I'm just trying to get back on track with my apprentices duties." Leafpaw answered but I noticed her shoulders stiffen.

I decided not push her into spilling why she was out in the forest, *we all have secrets.*

* * *

Soft nudging on my flank woke me up from my sleep, "Wake up Silentpaw, its time to go inside the Moon Cave." Mouseclaw mewed while trying to wake up Leafpaw.

I let out a long yawn and stretched, everyone was tired from the walk to the Moon Cave so we all slept on the hard ground with no nests. I looked around and saw Finchstar sitting calmly in front of the cave entrance with Ravenwing, Blackpaw, and Dawnsky.

I sat up and trotted over to them with Leafpaw and Mouseclaw following more slowly.

"Ok, everyone stay close to one another, and don't get lost." Finchstar mewed before leading the way. My pelt prickled at the dark shadows of the Moon Cave, the small sound of dripping water was heard all around me with the loud clashing of the water fall sounding further any further away.

I walked flank to flank with Leafpaw while Dawnsky and Mouseclaw trailed close behind us. Finchstar was at the head of the

patrol with Ravenwing at her side and Blackpaw just behind them.

I could smell the fear scent from the cats around me and I knew they could smell mine. Leafpaws pelt prickled against my own as the Cave became darker and darker.

I couldn't find a difference if I closed my eyes or not, "Do we even know where we're going?" Blackpaw asked, I could sence the black apprentices fear.

"Don't threat, we are almost there." Finchstar mewed softly and continued walking with confident strides. Just then did I realize the hard ground of rock started to feel like it fit my paws?

It was like the rocky ground was shaping to form around my paws as I walked. The rushing water was no longer heard only the sound of shaking breathing from the patrol, the dripping water was fainter was we continued on.

3rd Person

A faint light appeared in the distance, Finchstar eyes perked at the sight and the ginger she-cat let out a sigh of relief.

Silentpaw and Leafpaws ears perked and eyes widened at the upcoming light. Mouseclaws eyes shone impatiently while Dawnsky wondered what she would see or what they would show her.

Blackpaw pawed at the hard stone impatiently while Ravenwing looked hopeful at the faint speck of light.

Soon the patrol was coming close to a big opening deep inside of the Moon Cave. The patrol stopped in amazement, most of them had seen the Moon cave only once before while some is their first time.

The Cave opened into a huge under ground hollow that had a stream running through it with a hole in the top that showered moon light over the small stream in the cave.

Silentpaw, Leafpaw, and Blackpaw all stared with wide mouths while the warriors all looked proud.

Finchstar was the first inside the large cave and stood in front of the awed apprentices, "Apprentices, welcome to the Moon Hollow!" Finchstar yowled and flicked her tail telling the apprentices to come forward.

"But I thought this place was called the Moon Cave?" Leafpaw asked to which Finchstar smiled and answered, "The SilverPelt Water Fall is the first part of our connection place with StarClan, first you must follow the SilverPelt river to the SilverPelt water fall then walk down the Moon Cave to get to the Moon Hollow." Finchstar explained and turned towards the rushing stream in the Moon Hollow.

"This stream in fact is apart of the SilverPelt river." Finchstar mewed a brought a paw down to the icy water.

"How do you share with Starclan?" Silentpaw asked sharing down at the clear water. Finchstar then turned to the apprentices with a flick of her ear.

"You look down." The leader mewed and the apprentices stared in confusion before looking down at the ground to see paw prints shaped into the stone floor. "How did these get here?!?" Silentpaw asked with widened eyes.

Mouseclaw let out a mrrow of laughter, "Their the Moon Steps, they have been carved in the stone floor of the Moon Hollow for many season before the time of the Mountain Range clans." Mouseclaw explained and nodded towards some more Moon Steps that went all the way down the edge of the Under ground SilverPelt river.

Finchstar then went to the closest pair of Moon Steps next to her and slide her damp paws into the paw shapes in the floor, "Once you do this and fall asleep you will enter the Starclan hunting grounds." Finchstar mewed and at once every cat went to drip they're paws into the water then went to the closet Moon Paws they could find.

Finchstar was in the center of the Moon Hollow with Ravenwing, Dawnsky, and Mouseclaw to her right with Blackpaw, Leafpaw, and Silentpaw to her left.

"Remember to keep your paws in the Moon Steps or you will not enter dream of StarClan." Finchstar mewed sternly before sinking into a loaf position while making sure to keep in paws in the Moon Steps.

The rest of the cats followed swiftly and soon the whole patrol had sunken into a deep slumber.

Finchstar opened her eyes to find herself standing in the middle of the Skyclan camp, a pale mist surrounded the camp and pushed aside as a tall tortoiseshell gray and black tom stepped into the clearing.

Finchstar gasped, "Guststar!" The ginger she-cat yelped before bowing her head at the tom. The ghostly tom let out a mrrow of laughter, "calm down Finch*fall,* we are all equals here in Starclans hunting grounds." Guststar mewed and Finchstar licked her chest fur, embarrassed.

"Of course, but Guststar I'd like to discuss what I need to do with the rouges, they are out of control and the mountain range clans don't know much of them besides the little information we can get from a apprentice aged rouge!" Finchstar mewed pleadingly to which Guststar flicked his tail for her to come forwards.

"Of course, Finchstar." The tom said before the two cats drifted into deep conversation.

Somewhere further away from Finchstar and Guststar was Dawnsky. The she-cat paced in front of similar she-cat to herself.

"Mother, are you sure you've not been able to reach out to Darkshadow?!? What if he's in trouble!" Dawnsky yowled at the she-cat. The she-cat shook out her white and gold before replying, "Dawnsky Darkshadow is out of Starclans reach." The she-cat shook her head in defeat. "We have tried all we can."

"Forestrain please, he has to be somewhere out there!" Dawnsky cried and Forestrain shook her head once again, "no Dawnsky, your brother is out of reach from Starclan. So he is now out of our concern." Forestrain mewed before rubbing her cheek against

Dawnskys.

The undergrowth rustled as a lean black tom with amber eyes pushed into the clearing where the Pointed claw rock stood tall.

Ravenwing stood staring at the sharp rock when a grey, white, and brown she-cat made her way to his side. "I haven't been able to talk to you in moons my love." The she-cat mewed and Ravenwing jumped at her voice.

The black tom stared at the she-cat for a few moments before muttering, "Monarchvine..?" Ravenwing muttered before throwing himself on the she-cat.

Ravenwing rubbed his cheek against Monarchvines before the sound of young mews made him turn his head, "Ravenwing! Ravenwing!" Yowled a black she-kit and a white and black tom.

The two kits threw themselves at Ravenwing causing the tom to fall backwards with the 2 kits stomping all over him. Monarchvine stood up and shook her pelt. "Crowkit! Berrykit! Leave Ravenwing alone." Monarchvine mewed and the two kits ran back towards their mother.

Ravenwing stared at the two kits before meeting Monarchvines gaze. There was a question in Ravenwing eyes and Monarchvine nodded.

"My kits..." Ravenwing mewed softly before running over to butting heads with the two kits.

"Monarchvine told us all about you Ravenwing!" Berrykit squeaked to his father with his tail high. "Yeah!" Crowkit mewed taking her place next to her brother, "Monarchvine says your clan needs you right now so you can't be with us, but one day you can!" Crowkit mewed happily.

Ravenwing brought himself lower so he was face to face with his kits, "Do you two want a eagle ride?" Ravenwing asked and both of the kits jumped over his head and onto his back in excitement.

Both of the kits were very young but they could speak perfectly and

their careful placed paw steps showed Ravenwing that while his kits would never be able to get their warrior names, they could still train and be happy with their mother in Starclan.

Mouseclaw raised his head just above some bushes and was able to make out Ravenwing playing with two kits while a she-cat watched, *Monarchvine and her kits!* The tom thought before hurring away, he didn't want to invade on Ravenwings time with his family.

Mouseclaw stopped dead in his tracks when he realized he was no longer on Skyclan territory. A vast land scape was where he stood, the dense wind blew his fur from left to right as he tried to make out where he was.

Windclan territory? No, not a scent of Clan cat was anywhere. Mouseclaw dropped into a crouch to try to get away from the wind when the wind just stopped.

Everything went silent. Mouseclaws head shot up at the scent of a cat. The scent was so familiar, the tom whipped his head around to be met with a glittering Starclan cat walking to wards him.

The cat looked so familiar, then as the cat came closer Mouseclaw saw, "Willownose!" He yowled running over to the she-cat.

Willownose ran faster towards Mouseclaw and both the warriors stopped dead in their tracks to greet each other. "Willownose, I missed you so much!" Mouseclaw mewed softly rubbing his cheek against Willownoses.

"I missed you too my dear, how are Silentpaw and Leafpaw?" Willownose asked while looking around the clearing as if looking for Silentpaw and Leafpaw.

"Their fine, Leafpaw is getting back on to her apprentice duties and Silentpaw is kinda the senior guard for the rouge prisoner we have." Mouseclaw explained while laughing slightly. Willownose turned away with a worried look on her face.

"Something wrong dear?" Mouseclaw asked and Willownose shook her head slightly, "I want you to watch our daughters carefully,

grief can blur the minds of young cats and make them choose the wrong choices." Willownose mewed before licking Mouseclaws face as if he was her kit.

"Come, Silentpaw and Leafpaw will join us soon." Willownose mewed before leading Mouseclaw away.

Blackpaw was stalking through a dense grassy field, the grass was taller then a full grown warrior and it was hard to tell where he was.

Blackpaw suddenly stiffened at a acid scent touching his nose, "What in Starclan-" The apprentice stared but was cut off by a explosion of smoke irrupting around him. Blackpaw coughed and gasped before trying to turn around and go back to way he came to see that that was also covered in smoke.

Panic surged through Blackpaw as the smoke started coming closer and closer and a shadowy figure was seen barley in the smoke ahead.

"Whos there?!?" Blackpaw yowled but was cut off by a cough, "Show yourself!"

The figure started walking closer and Blackpaw went into a crouch, if this cat wanted to fight Blackpaw would bring it but when the cat stepped just before it was out of the smoke soft murmurs came from all around the smoke haze.

Their murmurs turned into soft words, then normal talking, then yowls of panic and rage.

"Fear this cat!"

"Don't listen to this cat!"

"Stay away from this cat!"

"He's a danger to us all!"

"Don't listen to him Blackpaw!"

"Blackpaw stay away!"

The voices became louder and louder until Blackpaw had to cover his ears to avoid their raspy yowls and pleads.

then everything went dark.

Leafpaw awoke in a small clearing, the sky was a pale orange and the RiverPelt rivers rushing waves could be heard not far away.

Leafpaw yawned before taking in her surroundings. To her left was Skyclan territory, she could smell the scent of her fellow clan mates and one scent overlapped them all, *Silentpaw.* But to her right a different cat scent touched her nose and she reconized Shadowclan scent. Leafpaw caught the scent of a specific cat, *Thornpaw?*

Leafpaw was standing right in between the borders between Skyclan and Shadowclan but why? Why did she wake up here? Was Starclan trying to tell her something.

The undergrowth ahead started to rustle and a unfamiliar she-cat stepped into the clearing. The she-cat had pale brown fur and darker speckles scattered around her pelt, the she-cats glowing yellow eyes shone with wisdom.

"Hello, Leafpaw." The she-cat mewed, her voice was menacing yet so full of wisdom. "My name is Frailwisp." She mewed softly and stpped closer to Leafpaw who stood tall.

"Hi? Who are you? I was expecting to see Willownose.." Leafpaw mewed softly looking away from Frailwisps stare. "I could tell, you and your sister will both see your mother soon." Frailwisp mewed before turning towards the Shadowclan border.

"I saw you have a friend that is of a different clan." Frailwisp mewed settling down on the line between Skyclan and Shadowclan. Leafpaws pelt prickled and her claws unsheathed, Frailwisp noticed this and flicked his ear dismissly. "I won't tell anyone who does not already know." The speckled she-cat mewed.

Leafpaw stared at the she-cat with no reply, "Don't worry, I've been in the same situation as you before." Frailwisp paused and looked

towards Shadowclan territory, "A young Skyclan apprentice going through grief and needing to talk to someone. Young and in love with one outside of your own home."

Leafpaws pelt prickled more at the words 'Young and in love.'

"I just have a friend outside of my own clan! There is nothing wrong with that!" Leafpaw mewed but was cut off by Frailwisp,

"And what will happen if you have to battle a Shadowclan patrol! You'd be hurting Thornpaws clanmates! How could you live with yourself knowing that?!?" Frailwisp snarled and it felt like her words echoed through the Mountain Range.

Frailwisp suddenly started to fade and the she-cat panicked. "Don't go see Thornpaw again! It will cause you pain and suffering! Leafpaw listen to me, please.. Leafpaw-" Frailwisps words were cut off as the she-cat fully disappeared right in front of Leafpaws eyes.

The breeze was warm as Silentpaw rested on top of a large boulder, she was resting on a boulder next to the stream that ran fast just before rushing down the SiverPelt water fall.

The sky was pale orange as she watched small and big fish swimming through the water. A scent of cat touched Silentpaws nose and she turned to see a she-cat approaching her.

The she-cat had gray fur with darker stripes and soft white patches across her pelt, her eyes were greener then the lush grass of new leaf.

"Good evening, Silentpaw." The she-cat mewed while settling down next to Silentpaw. Silentpaw turned towards the she-cat, "You have a Skyclan scent." Silentpaw mewed curiously but this she-cat was not one she reconized.

"Mhm! My name is Jaysong." The gray she-cat mewed happily. "I was once a young Skyclan apprentice like you! Swift, curious, young, confused, and in love with one outside of the warrior code." Jaysong mewed softly and turning towards Silentpaw whos pelt prickled, embarrasassed.

Silentpaw wrapped her tail over her paws and stared down at the water ignoring Jaysongs look of amusement. "I'm not confused and I'm not in love with anyone outside of the warrior code." Silentpaw mewed confidently but deep down she knew it was not true.

Jaysong let out a mrrow of laughter, "I'm sure you have everything figured out, I'm sure hawk won't be hurt when you tell her you don't feel the same." Jaysong mewed before standing up and jumping from the rock.

Silentpaw stared wide eyed for a moment before yowling to Jaysong, "What do you mean?!?" Silentpaw yowled while jumping from the rock and fell into step next to Jaysong.

"This has nothing to do with Hawk!" Silentpaw hissed and Jaysong rolled her eyes, "You and that rouge have a bond even if you don't see it. I had the same with a she-cat named Arrow." Jaysong mewed softly while looking towards to sky.

"Arrow? But no clan cat would be called Arrow." Silentpaws ears lifted as a gust of wind blew past them, "I never said Arrow was a clan cat." Jaysong mewed.

Silentpaws eyes widened as she started to understand what jaysong was telling her, "Your saying your relationship with a rouge is close to me and Hawks friendship?!? No way! I'm a loyal Skyclan cat, I would never betray my clan!" Silentpaw protested as Jaysong looked on.

"Speaking of which, I heard Starclan cats walk the skies and in Mountain Range territory! Why are you all the way out here?" Silentpaw asked and Jaysong sighed, "I told you, I bonded with a rouge just as you have, my clan cats rejected me for one being with a rouge and two because the rouge was a she-cat. I was exiled but my ansestors let me roam Starclan if my kin wish to see me, and now I walk along the Mountain Range and beyond." Jaysong explained finally turning to Silentpaw.

"You love that rouge don't you?" Jaysong asked with no hesitation, "I-" Silentpaw started but cut herself off, "I don't know.." Silentpaw admitted bowing her head.

"Well you should find out." Jaysong mewed and started to walk towards the under growth but stopped before she entered. "Whatever happens after you decide will change your life forever." Jaysong said before trotting away.

The wind speed picked up again causing Silentpaw to close her eyes to block out the wind. Finally when the wind suppsided Silentpaw realized she was in a different place.

The scent of Mouseclaw and Leafpaw filled her nose and she turned to see them walking with, *Willownose?!!?*

Silentpaw jumped to her paws to ran towards her kin, "Willownose! Mouseclaw! Leafpaw!" Silentpaw yowled at them causing them all to turn towards her.

"Silentpaw!" Leafpaw yowled as Silentpaw came to stop in front of Willownose. Willownose stared down lovely at Silentpaw and Silentpaw burried her muzzle in mother fur. "Its good to see you too, Loudpaw." Willownose teased.

Silentpaw had a rush of joy to be back with all of her kin. Jaysongs words still echoed in the back of her mind, *'Your love that rouge don't you?'* Silentpaw pushed away her worries of Jaysong and Hawk and enjoyed her time with her kin. Little did Silentpaw know that Leafpaw was having similar thoughts.

The time the four of them spent together was great but soon Silentpaw, Leafpaw, and Mouseclaw all started to fade. They knew it was time to wake up but none of them wanted to.

Silentpaw and Leafpaw burried themselves into their mothers pelt, "We'll miss you." Leafpaw muttered, "You'll see me again one day my loves." Willownose said as she rubbed her cheek against Mouseclaws.

"But I must go now, goodbye and be the best warriors you can until we meet again." Willownose mewed as the cats faded competely.

Then all the cats of the patrols eyes opened to be met with the Moon Hollow. All cold, and most wishing they could go back.

***

A/N: I DID NOT EXPECT THIS CHAPTER TO BE SOOOOOOO LONG IM SO SORRY BUT ANGST IG
- Caption

(man, editing this chapter is going to be a literal pain in the ass)
- Fox/Cloudy

18 | tension

4/7

L E A F

Don't go see Thornpaw again! It will only cause you pain and suffering...

Leafpaw, listen to me please! Leafpaw, he will make you miserable.

You have nothing to gain from him. He's not what you think he is.

Leafpaw! Leafpaw Listen to me! LEAFPAW!

With a jolt, my eyes flew open and sat up in my nest. My breath came out in ragged gasps as my foggy mind began to clear up. My body was shaking as I replayed the thoughts over and over again.

A relieved sigh escaped my lips as I realized it was nothing but a dream. But even so, it felt vivid and so real.

Frailwisp...right? I sighed. The she-cats warning of me staying away from Thornpaw seemed to have boggled my mind. Why was she even telling me that?

I remember hearing that the she-cat said that she was also in the same situation as me.

Does that mean she fell in love with another clan cat?

My ears flattened at the thought. Great starclan, I'm not in love! I just found a friend to rely on. Is that a little too much?

Maybe it didn't work out for her. Maybe when she fell in love something tragic happened. Or maybe she just wants to play a prank on an apprentice right before she faded.

Okay, my bad. I shouldn't have said that. But right now, her words were occupying my every thought and made me feel uneasy. If she

thought that it was meant to help me, she was very wrong. It seemed to make things worse.

I decided to not stress over at the moment and got up from my nest. The other apprentice—Blackpaw and Silentpaw—were snoring away from their nests. It still shocked me that we traveled all the way to the Moon Cave and it was already a quarter moon since we went there.

The image of the Moon Hollow was still vivid in my mind. Just like the dream. My eyes flicked over to where Blackpaw and Silentpaw were. What dreams did they receive? Did they also get any type of warnings like I did?

I sighed and padded out of the den, ducking my head under the growing vine along the cracked stone walls.

Outside the clan was bustling. Mallowtail was sitting near the end of the rockpile and instructing cats for border patrols. Finchstar was sitting outside her den, cleaning her pelt with strong slow licks.

I slid down the rockslide and made my way over to the fresh-kill pile. My eyes flicked over to the pile only to be filled with disappointment from the lack of prey within.

"Leafpaw!"

Turning my head at the sound of the voice, I pinpointed Dawnsky walking over to me. I straightened my spine as I turned around to face my mentor.

"Good to see that you're awake," she mewed. Her gaze flicked over to the apprentice den where the other two were probably snoring away. What could possibly make them so tired?

You're just as guilty mouse-brain.

I shoved the thought away, not wanting to stress myself thinking about him. And whenever I think of him, my mind wanders to what the starclan she-cat told me.

"Do you need me for anything?"

Dawnsky nodded. "Yep, you're in a border patrol with me and Snowpebble. We're gonna take a nice visit to Thunderclan." She nodded to the small fresh-kill pile. "Find something to eat and come over to me when you're done."

I let out a nod and was about to head toward the direction when Dawnsky stopped me with her tail. I halted and turned to look at her with a confused look.

"You do remember that there is a gathering today, right?" Dawnsky asked and drew her tail back. Her whiskers twitched.

Already?

"So soon?" I blurt out, taken by surprise.

Dawnsky nodded and let out a purr. "I mean you did spend most of your time sleeping and resting so time probably flew rather quickly."

I tensed. Going to the gathering meant seeing other cats. And one of them being Thornpaw.

Don't Leafpaw...

I scrunched up my face in annoyance and scowled. I just wanted to shut my thoughts up at this point. A few weeks ago the only thing on my mind was Willownose. And now its Frailwisp and Thornpaw.

"Finchstar picked you to go," she continued. "So try to get some rest after, you'll need it."

Dawnsky then let out a sigh. "I could tell this gathering will be a tense one." Turning around, the black and white tortoiseshell bounded off leaving me in a knot of frustration. I turn back around and plucked a stale vole from the pile and bit into it hungrily.

As I ate, I became lost in my thought—which happened quite frequently. I was so deep in thought that I didn't notice a bundle of orange fur sitting beside me.

"Hiya."

I quickly turned my head toward the voice and saw Silentpaw staring at me, her eyes shining happily.

"Look who decided to wake up," I mutter.

"Hey, I was tired okay?"

I rolled my eyes. "From what? We didn't even do anything intense yesterday."

Silentpaw shrugged, obviously not wanting to talk about it. Lifting up her paw, she began to clean her face with smooth, rhythmic strokes. I bit into my vole and chewed slowly, savoring the stale taste.

"What are you going to do afterwards?" Silentpaw asked, her paw mid-air from her cleansing. I finished chewing and swallowed before answering.

"I'm gonna go on a border patrol. What about you?"

"I don't know. I haven't asked Mallowtail." Silentpaw yawned tiredly. I narrowed my eyes at her, suspicion brewing in me. I couldn't help but notice that Silentpaw was tired most of the time. She would yawn frequently and would zone out making me wonder if she even had enough sleep.

Was there something she wasn't telling me?

The thought sat oddly in my mind. We were sisters right? Hiding things from each other just for our own benefits just didn't seem right—even if I'm hiding something from her. Every time I talked with her, I wanted to tell her my deepest secret so badly but it was an effort not to because what if she didn't agree?

What if I lost her because of one dumb mistake I decided to make?

As I took a finishing bite, I couldn't help but wonder—what if there was a low chance of Silentpaw being in the same situation as me?

Just a little different? I forced the thought out and got up from my spot. Silentpaw looked up.

"I'm gonna go," I tell her. "Don't forget there's a gathering today!"

Silentpaw stopped cleaning her chest. "There's a what—?!"

Glad I'm not the only one shocked. Guess great minds think alike.

Stifling back an amused snort, I padded over to Dawnsky whom was standing next to Mallowtail and talking to him. The two were laughing quietly while a few cats sent knowing glances toward their direction as they walked toward their designated patrols.

"Dawnsky? Uh, I'm ready..I think," I meowed loudly, interrupting their moment. Dawnsky pricked her ears and widened as she saw me staring at the two of them with delight. She gave her chest an embarrassed lick and shuffled away from the deputy who let an amused purr.

"Oh right." She gave Mallowtail a farewell mew before walking over to where Snowpebble who was waiting impatiently.

When he saw the two of us he let out a breath of relief. "Great starclan, what was holding you two up?"

I rolled my eyes at the white tom. "More like what was holding Dawnsky up." I gave my mentor a teasing glance and squeezed out of the entrance. Snowpebble hurried after me with Dawnsky following right behind him.

The forrest outside was starting to look more alive. Buds were slowly forming on the edge of the branches. A few were already blossoming leaves and petals. I knew from the start that new-leaf would be a breathtaking sight.

The three of us trekked through the forrest, occasionally talking about the rouges, prey, and other clans. As we drew closer to the Thunderclan, I caught the pungent smell of Thunderclan scent markers that clashed with Skyclan ones and the rushing of the stream that acted as a miniature natural border for the two clans.

Snowpebble went up to a tree—one of our clan borders and gave it a sniff. He raised his head and flicked his tongue out before slowly making his way over to us.

"Is something wrong?" Dawnsky asked.

"Yeah, it seems like Thunderclan has been *strengthening* their borders." Snowpebble let out a low growl as he swept his gaze over to the Thunderclan side of the border. "I can barely smell the Skyclan ones over theirs."

"Maybe ours are just stale?" I hopefully suggested even though it couldn't be true. Snowpebble was right about one thing.

The scent maker was very recent meaning that Thundeclan had been closely watching the border. But why? Were they concerned that we were going to cross the border? It sounded dumb since the only one who would be eager enough to cross *any* border would be the rouges. Not Skyclan or any clan.

Snowpebble snorted. "Sure ours are stale but that doesn't explain why theirs are so strong. The entire place reeks of Thunderclan. I wouldn't be surprised if some of them cross the border to put their scent markers over our own."

Dawnsky looked skeptical. "We don't know that but I do share your concern that they over-scented their markers. Perhaps they are just trying to prevent an attack from the rouges from happening." She shifted her gaze. "We don't know most of the clans history within the past moon anyway."

Just as Dawnsky finished talking, the undergrowth rustled revealing a group of cats walking up to the border. I let out a shock hiss as I recognized the first cat.

Ashstar.

The three cats within the patrol halted when they saw a group of Skyclan cats standing right in front of them with narrowed eyes and fluffed out fur. As they stepped closer, I noticed claw marks scourged on the sides of their pelts and flanks. My eyes slightly widened at the sight.

Snowpebble scowled at the Thunderclan cats but had the sense to keep his mouth shut. Dawnsky stepped forward and dipped her

head respectfully to Ashstar who stared at us with venom leaking out of his eyes.

"Ashstar," she mewed brightly. "It's good to see you looking well. I hope Thunderclan is doing fine?"

I expected Ashstar to answer but instead he glared at the tortoiseshell as if he expected to unravel her series of questions with a glance. Noticing how tense and rigid the clan leader seemed, I wondered if the rouges had also attacked them. Only except he seemed more paranoid than tense.

"I hope you fox-hearted skyclan cats aren't up to anything," Ashstar hissed, his ears flat on his head and his tail fluffed out. I blinked at the tom, astounded. Turning my head to Snowpebble, we shared a surprised glance before turning back to the scene.

Definitely wasn't expecting that.

Dawnsky also seemed shocked by Ashstar's response but kept her fur flat and her voice neutral as she spoke. "Of course we aren't. Not when rouges are on the lose."

Ashstar only let out a mere growl. Behind him, the two Thunderclan warriors—Littlefoot and Sandstep—looked uncomfortable as their leader spoke.

"I'm sure they haven't done anything wrong," Littlefoot mewed to Ashstar in an attempt to assure him. The tom looked hesitant at his leaders action but also angered as the leader was doing nothing but making a fool of himself and his clan. Whatever the attempt to calm him down was, it only seemed to make the situation worse.

"Really?" he spat. "Then tell me why I smelled *their* scent on *our* side of the border?"

Snowpebble unsheathed his claws, snarling, while Dawnsky let out a hiss. My fur fluffed out at Ashstar's accusation.

What is he talking about? We never crossed the border let alone even putting our scent markers....where did he even get such thought? Especially when both of his clanmates look confused.

"We never crossed the border!" Snowpebble spat. "As you can see, your own scent markers reek this entire place and you can barely smell ours, so how is ours on your side?"

"I smelled your clans scent in our border!" Ashstar yowled.

"Do you have proof for that?" Dawnsky challenged. She narrowed her eyes into slits at the leader who seemed to have gone berserk at the moment. "Until you have proof that our clan has crossed your borders, you shouldn't be accusing when your clan reeks all over our side and the whole place. I assure you Ashstar, our clan did not cross the border."

Dawnsky glowered at the leader expecting him to retort back, reciting claims without any evidence. However, much to our luck Sandstep quickly went over to Ashstar and whispered something in his ear. Whatever she told him seemed to ease him and take a step back.

"This isn't over," he rasped.

"Since when was it?"

Ashstar left with a snarl with Sandstep bounding behind him. Littlefoot threw us an apologetic glance before his dark brown pelt disappeared into the thicket leaving the three of us dumbfounded.

"What was that even about?" i blurt out, turning to Dawnsky who's eyes were lingering where the Thunderclan cats just were.

"I'm assuming the rouges attacked them," she replied. "I don't see other reasons why Ashstar would be so paranoid."

"But accusing us of going over to their side?" Snowpebble exclaimed. "That's a load of mouse dropping!"

"Of course it is," I snap. "He seemed determine to frame us for something we didn't do."

Dawnsky lashed her tail in response. "Whatever the case may be, we must report this to Finchstar. The last thing we need is another war when we're already struggling with one." She then nodded at the

border markers. "Right now let's replenish our scent."

Snowpebble and I both agreed and moved over to where our markers were suppose to be, and sprayed our scents there. Once we made sure that Skyclan scent was in *our* side, Dawnsky told us we should do some hunting before we headed back to the camp.

"And of course away from the Thunderclan border," she added with it being obvious that slipping for something like that could cost a lot. Whatever Thunderclan was going through, I hoped that it wouldn't bring any troubles in the future.

* * *

After our patrol was done hunting, the three of us headed back to the camp with plentiful of prey. I dropped my shrew and two robins that I killed.

When I entered the camp, the first thing I noticed that it was mostly empty other than Swiftleap guarding the nursery though Hawk was nowhere to be seen (she's probably in the den) and Embernose pacing around the outer edges of the camp, his eyes and ears alert for any enemies that could be lurking in the bushes.

The elders were basking outside the den, talking amongst themselves. Ivypaw was laying herbs outside the medicine cat den. Mallowtail and Finchstar were no where to be seen so I assumed they were out patrolling as everyone else were probably doing the same thing.

I turned back to Dawnsky where she was picking up a pigeon from the fresh-kill pile and quickly made my way over to her. Dawnsky looked up, the prey dangling from her jaw.

"What's up?" she mumbled, wheezing slightly as a feather flew up in front of her.

"I was wondering if we'll be continuing our training sessions soon?"

"Ah—about that," she starts, crouching down and dropping her prey to her paws. "Finchstar decided that we'd do some training sessions together. Not just apprentice with apprentice, or the mentors

teaching their apprentice. Instead a group of warriors and apprentices will have practice sessions where the warriors would teach the apprentice."

"That seems cool," I tell her.

"It is. It'll help speed up the training process but also help prepare everyone in case another attack happens." Dawnsky paused for a moment before she continued. "By the way, you'll be having an assessment soon."

"An assessment? On what?"

"On hunting," she meows. "It's nothing to stress over but think of it as a practice assessment for your real one."

I stifled a snort. "There's no way I'm going to be a warrior so soon. I mean there's so much to learn."

Dawnsky flicked her ear at me as she took a bite from her pigeon. "I never said you're going to have your warrior assessment soon but it's bound to happen right? And who knows if you'll pass on your first go. Not everyone does."

I recoiled back in shock. "There are cats who failed their warrior assessment?"

Dawnsky rolled her eyes. "Yes, mouse-brain. Not everyone is going to be perfect in one go. Foxwhisker didn't pass his first assessment but he passed his second one yet he was one of our best warriors. Not passing your assessment doesn't you're a failure or unskilled, it just means you need to put more effort and and think about what you did wrong so you won't do it again."

I stayed quiet, thinking about what Dawnsky said. What she said seemed to be true but what if there are cats who didn't pass their second assessment? Were they not putting effort or just didn't care? I couldn't help but feel that not passing on the first go meant that *something* was definitely wrong with you. "But it must suck if you don't pass your assessment," I admit.

"It sure does," Dawnsky agreed. "Anyway, why don't you go rest?

The gathering is soon and I'm sure you'll be picked to go."

"Okay," I meowed and turned around was about to head up the rockslide when Silentpaw came crashing through the camp entrance alerting everyone in the camp. She stood in the middle of the camp, her fur ruffled and spiked out while her breaths came out in short huffs.

I stopped in my tracks. "Is everything alright, Silentpaw?"

The reddish-orange she-cat let out a nod before giving an excited jump. "Yep! Everything is alright, I'm just super energetic."

I sighed. "That much I can tell."

The camp entrance rustled once more revealing Mallowtail and Emebernose who looked to be out of breath.

"Great starclan, Silentpaw!" Mallowtail exclaimed. "Can't let a warrior catch his breath?"

"Sorry!" Silentpaw threw him a sheepish look but didn't look one bit guilty. She turned around and faced me with bright eyes. "So whatcha doing?"

"Nothing."

"So then lets hang out before we get swept with the gathering," Silentpaw declared. "Let's find Ivypaw and share tongues!"

I opened my mouth but Silentpaw slapped her tail over it and ordered me to move which I reluctantly agreed and walked over to where Ivypaw was quietly working. When Silentpaw asked if Ivypaw wanted to share prey with us, she was at first hesitant until Parsleyseed appeared and shooed her away—saying that she needed to take a break.

For the rest of our time, the three of us spent our time under a bramble bush, enjoying amongst ourselves. Slowly one by one, Skyclan patrols returned and soon the camp was alive as cats shared tongues and basked in the last rays of the sun as it slowly disappeared over the hill.

Before I knew it, the gathering was to come. As I swept my gaze over the Skyclan camp, I noticed that Blackpaw was nowhere to be seen. Ravenwing was also here which means that they're done with their training and patrolling.

So where is he?

"I'm excited," Silentpaw said, interrupting my train of thoughts. I turned to face her. "I wonder what it's going to be like this time."

"It might be tense," Ivypaw responded. She flicked her ear over to where Dawnsky, Snowpebble, and Finchstar were talking.

"I heard them saying about Ashstar being hostile toward your patrol." Ivypaw turned her head toward me and stared at me. "Is it true?"

A sigh escapes. "Yeah, he accused of Skyclan crossing the border."

Silentpaw butted in. "Woah, wait, him in general or his warriors? Am I hearing things correctly?" she questioned. I nodded with her statement.

"You are—yes it was him who accused us. In fact, his *own* warriors were shocked by his actions and tried to ease the problems."

Silentpaw shook her head, obviously astounded. "Wouldn't you expect the clan leader to be easing the problems instead of accusing directly to us? What a fur-brain."

"You shouldn't talk about a leader like that," Ivypaw scolded and swiped at Silentpaw's ears only to recoil back when she realized she'll be hitting nothing but air as her ears were folded. Ivypaw scowled and drew her paw back, annoyance written all over her face.

I let out a purr of laughter at the sight.

"He doesn't act like one," Silentpaw insisted. "He doesn't have any evidence that we actually crossed and he blandly accuses us? That's a load of mouse-droppings."

From the corner of my eyes, I saw Dawnsky and Snowpebble heading down from Finchstar's den while Finchstar went up to the Meeting Rock and let out a yowl that rang across the camp. Cats stopped what they were doing and looked up to their leader.

"SkyClan! It is time to head to the gathering. I must add before we head out is to stay cautious around ThunderClan. We don't know their intentions but we clearly know that Ashstar intends to bring in trouble. Whatever happens, we will not be victimized by his wishes. We are stronger and wiser than that."

Cheers arose while Finchstar gave an approving nod. "Let's head out!"

Ivypaw wished a quick farewell to us and went up to Parsleyseed.

"C'mon," Silentpaw whispered and hurried over to where Dawnsky and Ravenwing were standing. And surprisingly, Blackpaw was standing right next to him. He turned his head and then our eyes locked for a second. My eyes widened slightly as I saw a dangerous lurk glinting in his eyes as our eyes connected and with that he quickly looked away and padded behind his mentor.

An uncomfortable lump sat in my stomach but I forced myself to push the ugly thought away. But even so I couldn't help but think—what if he's doing something behind Skyclan's back?

Urging my paws to move, I hurried after Dawnsky and set in a medium pace beside Silentpaw. Leapflight and Honeywisp were staying back to guard Hawk and the camp. All of the elders were also able to come, including Flowerheart who seemed to have recovered from her lung infection though I suspected she was still suffering from it.

As we headed toward the Gathering Hill, the clan was murmuring in hushed, anxious tones and I knew that they were all tense about what the gathering would bring. The Gathering Hill grew closer and closer and I could make out Riverclan scrambling over the steep hill and heading through the bushes. ShadowClan followed then it was us.

The view of the tree sitting on top of the hill was even more beautiful that last time. Buds and flowers rested on the branches illuminating a soft glow as the moon's light shone.

Our clan scrambled up the hills and pushed through the bushes leading us to where Riverclan and Shadowclan were patiently waiting. Finchstar and Mallowtail left the clans side to go over to their designated spot. Parsleyseed and Ivypaw scrambled up to a giant rock that was next to the tree and greeted their fellow medicine cats.

I sat beside Silentpaw and waited beside her patiently. Behind us Windclan appeared with Thymestar in the lead and Havenfern behind him. Thymestar scrambled up the branch and took his place besides Finchstar, who gave him a respectful dip.

After a few more moments, Ashstar appeared from the brambles with his clan following tensely behind him. I watched him with narrowed gaze as he jumped up to the low branch and sat beside Thistlestar while his clan took their place between us and Shadowclan

Thymestar stepped forward and let out a yowl gaining everyones attention. "The gathering may begin! WindClan will start first.

"The start of new-leaf has brought plentiful of prey among the moors. Our clan is eating well and stands strong. To add on, we have two newly made warriors to add to our ranks. Vallydawn and Kestrelsong!"

Windclan along with other few chanted the two new warriors who both looked to be proud. Thymestar stepped back and Minnowstar stepped forward.

"While the harsh leaf-bare had made finding and hunting prey difficult, RiverClan is honored to have two new warriors added to our ranks. We weclome Echopaw and Foxpaw now as Echoriver and Foxflip!"

The clearing broke into caterwauls of joy for the two new warriors. I peered over my shoulder wo where RiverClan was gathered and

saw a grayish blue tom—Echoriver—and a ginger she-cat—Foxflip —sitting together side by side while holding their heads up proudly.

When the yowls broke down, Minnowstar continued speaking. "Our queen, Tinystep, has also given birth to two healthy she-kits, Sapkit and Applekit. We thank StarClan for a safe delivery." Minnowstar dipped her head as the five Clans cheered. Though I could see that ThunderClan was more reluctant to do so.

Thistlestar took lead as Minnowstar sat back down. As he spoke, I tried not to think about Thornpaw even though I know for sure that he came to the gathering. My mind instantly went back to the Frailwisp's warning. I swallowed tightly. Perhaps just for caution, I should not see him. It's for the best since our Clan state and my own aren't in the best.

Shifting back my attention to Thistlestar who was now filing in about one of his patrol was attacked by rouges. He added that thanks to Skyclan's help, they managed to fight back but obviously unscathed. "With heavy news comes along with good news. Brindlestone has given birth to two kits, it has been awhile now, but the kits remain healthy and strong, showing no sign of sickness. ShadowClan is secured." Thistlestar looked at Finchstar. "You may go now."

"Thank you, Thistlestar," Finchstar meowed.

Ashstar, sitting next to Minnowstar, who was next to Thistlestar, turned his head at the ginger she-cat and watched her with glare. Finchstar paid no mind to the old tom and instead started her report.

"Like Thistlestar reported, rouges have attacked two border patrols with it being Shadowclan and Skyclan. Both clans fought hard and while ShadowClan may have taken a few good blows, Skyclan had been clawed a deeper mark. One of our swift, wise warrior, Willownose was killed from the attack. We mourned her loss as it hit a tragedy to the whole clan. Nevertheless, we will hold her close to our heart and make sure her death wasn't in vain!"

Finchstar stopped as SkyClan bursted into yowls and cheers at the

mention of long lost warrior who will forever be remembered. A dull ache pricked my heart at the mention of Willownose. It hurted knowing she was gone but she's not really gone. Not when so many of my clan mates respect and mourned for her. Not when Finchstar declared her death wasn't in vain. I really missed her but standing next to my clan mates as they yowled her name made me tingle with pride and happiness.

Thistlestar got up and dipped his head at Finchstar, his gaze holding respect. "I'm terribly sorry for your loss, Finchstar. Knowing that she fought along us, I will also hold the respect toward her and her death will not be in vain. Not when we fought the same enemy together."

"Thank you, Thistlestar," Finchstar mewed, her voice warm like the new-leaf breeze. Thymestar gave an approving mew while Minnowstar just nodded.

"Yes I agree. Times are harsh especially when the rouges are attacking all of the clans." Minnowstar hunched her shoulders. "It's a matter of time when more deaths become evident."

Finchstar let out a murmur and stepped back allowing Ashstar to get up. His gaze swept over the clans and stopped when his gaze landed on Skyclan. I could hear the anxious murmurs from Thunderclan as they gazed up at their leader with worry.

At first, Ashstar did not say anything at all. But then finally he turned his gaze to Finchstar and curled his lips.

"You say one of your warriors died, eh?" he growled in a low voice. My pelt bristled at his words. I felt Silentpaw go rigid beside me.

"What has that mouse-brain got to say about Willownose?" she hissed softly. Dawnsky threw her a warning glance and turned her head back to the leaders but I could see her claws were unsheathe. Embernose and Ravenwing were already glaring at Ashstar while Swiftleap and Petalshade sent uneasy glances toward Thunderclan. Mouseclaw was sitting beside Silentpaw, his pelt prickling anxiously. I could nearly smell the belligerent attitude radiating off of everyone.

"Perhaps it's well deserved considering that SkyClan crossed ThunderClan border!" Ashstar yowled.

Gasps of horror echoed through the place but I could barely register the shock of what Ashstar said about Willownose. There was no way he said Willownose *deserved* it. Fury erupted through me as my blue eyes glared at the tom who called himself a leader.

Mouseclaw let out a furious snarl while Silentpaw leaped to her paws and hissed in rage. Cloudfur and Stoneheart let out yowls of shock. Dawnsky had her ears lain back while Snowpebble spat in spleen. Everyone in Skyclan was clearly boiling and livid toward Ashstar's words.

Everyone else were all splayed in shock, including Thunderclan. Finchstar stared at Ashstar, her jaw opened slightly as if she was trying to process his words. Minnowstar simply let out a hiss of disrespect and stepped away from the tom.

"How can you say that about Willownose?!" Silentpaw, beside me, screeched. "You must have no respect to say such things in front of everyone!"

My eyes widened in shock as I whirled to face her. "Shut up! You can't just blurt that out!"

But just as I said that, Mallowtail rose from his spot. "Silentpaw!" he snapped and locked gaze with his apprentice until she eventually shrank down though her fury never ceased. I didn't blame her because I was also a seething mess.

While Finchstar was clearly upset, she didn't let it show instead she stepped in front of Ashstar and stared at him in the eye.

"You accuse of SkyClan crossing the border when my patrol reported that your side and including ours reeked of your scent and have the audacity to not only make claims about thing you have no proof of but also insult a honorable warrior. Have you have no shame for saying such things?" she snarled, her eyes evoking a hidden rage that I had never seen before.

"Have you have no shame for crossing the border and denying it?!" Ashstar sneered and gave his tail a lash.

"No one crossed the border!" Finchstar yowled. Thistlestar and Minnowstar both gave the two leaders uneasy stares as they stepped away. Thymestar, however, quickly padded forward and stepped between the two cats.

"Calm down, both of you. Perhaps we can find a way to ease this without tearing each other's throat."

Ashstar let out a hiss, his eyes alight with anger. He turned on the WindClan leader, his teeth bared. From the corner of my eyes, I saw WindClan's deputy, Havenfer, tense slightly at Ashstar's actions. "Your telling me you support SkyClan?"

"I never—"

Just then a deafening boom echoed within the Tree Hollow. Cats looked up and let out cries of horror as they saw dark clouds forming in the sky. Another lightening crackled making everyone let out yowls of fear.

"StarClan is angry!" someone cried.

I jumped as I felt someone nudge my flank. Turning around, I saw Dawnsky nudging me to get up. Silentpaw was already by Mouseclaw's side and hurrying after him.

"Let's go," she meowed, her voice tense. Everyone around was already getting up and leaving. I got up swiftly and ran after my clan mates. As I did, I prodded past two ThunderClan warriors who were talking amongst themselves that I happened to catch.

"Great StarClan, Ashstar never announced the new apprentices and the newly made medicine cat!" one of them hissed as they brushed past me.

"He doesn't even deserve to be a leader after insulting a warrior like that and forgetting his own apprentices!"

As I slipped past them and hurried over to Mouseclaw's side, I

couldn't help but feel anxious. This gathering had brought nothing but more division among the clan when the Clans needed to stand together.

What would become of us?

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a/n: Just by looking at these chapters, I'm questioning myself if I would even have the motivation to edit them . . .

19 | truth

4/7

B L A C K

Well that was interesting. I thought flopping down into my nest. The Skyclan cats who went to the gathering had all returned by now and the whole clan was furious about what the Thunderclan leader, Ashstar, had said about Willownose, one of our recently deceased warriors who had been killed by a rouge while Skyclan was helping Shadowclan.

My denmates, Silentpaw and Leafpaw, were the daughters of Willownose. Silentpaw had spoken out against Ashstar after his harmful words which caused Silentpaw to get in trouble with her mentor, Mallowtail and our leader Finchstar.

I looked through the apprentice den entrance and saw Leafpaw pacing the entrance with a worried look in her eyes but also rage.

The dark reddish tabby was huffing as she paced and my eyes narrowed in annoyance. "Can any cat get some sleep around here!" I snapped and the she-cat turned her darkish blue gaze to mine. "Shut your muzzle fox heart!" Leafpaw snapped and I rolled over in my nest.

Mouse-brained she-cat. I turned my attention towards my front paws and noticed that the small thorn scar that I had gotten while on patrol the other high sun was healing quickly.

My gaze sharpened at a sudden memory and I perked up to look at the moon that I could barley see through the apprentice den roof.

I have to meet Shadepaw soon.

A few sunrises ago I had met the Shadowclan apprentice while I was on border patrol with Ravenwing and Mouseclaw. We were

hostile at first but then we both learned we both have a interest in the rouges and how they live.

If you had told my kit self that one day I would be interested in rouges he would have yowled that he was going to be the leader of Skyclan but now why would I want to lead a clan full of traitors and weak cats.

specially ones who fall in love with a cat of their own gender. My sharp gaze made its way to Silentpaw who was making her way over to a worried Leafpaw.

The two she-cats spoke in hushed voices but I could tell that they were both furious about the gathering. "That over grown dog is lucky Mallowtail told me to close my muzzle or I would have leaped onto the leaders tree and had sure he wouldn't be able to scent another cat on his borders again." Silentpaw hissed with narrowed eyes unsheathing her claws.

I would never admit it to any cat but in the first days of my kit hood I admired the red she-cat and her sister. Their father was one of Skyclans strongest warriors and their mother was one of the most admirable queens.

their lives were perfect with their parents and Finchstar had given them strong warriors as mentors, while I got a sorry excuse for a warrior as my mentor. Ravenwing was stuck up and snarled at every little thing I did.

Petalshade barley paid me any attention because she was always saying how proud she was of Swiftleap and Ivypaw, even though becoming a medicine cat pretty much called the cat weak and unworthy to ever even be born into a clan.

Med cats are for the weak they should all just becomes kitty pets. Embernose has not spoken to me in almost a moon because he was also focused on Ivypaw and her medicine cat duties. I never liked the cranky old medicine cat, Parsleyseed, the white tom always gave me cold stares when I left the camp as if he was waiting for me to do something.

After sometime Silentpaw and Leafpaw had settled into their nests and I could hear their soft breathing which told me they were asleep. I turned towards the roof to see the moon was at its highest and I slowly stepped out of my nest.

As I stepped out of the apprentice den I turned towards the nursery and saw no cat was on guard. The rouge prisoner had not tried to escape since she got here so Finchstar didn't give her a guard anymore.

I thought it was fox droppings that she had done that. The flee brain could try to escape at any time it was not wise of Finchstar to not give the nursery a guard.

In fact no cat was guarding the camp at all! I hissed softly before hurrying down the Rockslide path and stalking towards the thorn entrance.

I gave Skyclan camp one last look before I turned and hurried towards the Shadowclan border.

Running swiftly my paws came into step with the familiar territory that separated Skyclan and Shadowclan territory. Yes I should enjoy the rocky slopes and swift nature of a Skyclan cat but I would rather stay in a place like Shadowclan.

Their territory was dense and wild and I loved it. Shadepaw often bragged about how Shadowclan territory was the best in all the Mountain Range and I honestly agreed with him.

I'd rather hide in the shadows then in a mouse-brained tree like a scared squirrel. My paw ran faster and faster towards the Shadowclan border until I almost clashed straight into a black pelt with ran into my way.

I hissed thinking it was a warrior on patrol but a hiss of annoyance came back at me, "Blackpaw, straighten your fur squirrel brain!" Hissed the cat and I noticed that is was Shadepaw.

"Sorry, I was in a hurry to get here. The whole clan is furious about what happened at the gathering and it took awhile for them all to

sleep." I explained and sat down to groom my chest and back.

Shadepaw flicked his bushy tail and swiped at my ear with his white paw. "You squirrel brain we have to go! I caught some scents just past Shadowclan border this morning. We need to follow it before they fade." Shadepaw hissed and swiped at my shoulder with his sheathed claws.

The black and white tom then took off into the forest following the scent line in between Shadowclan and Skyclan, I jumped to my paws and quickly followed the tom.

Shadepaw and me stepped into sync paws with each other as we ran towards the end of the border which was just below the start of the tall mountains. As we ran the Starclan vision that was given to me at the Moon Hollow strayed into my mind and the dark figure of the cat in the vision came to me.

Who was he? Why would Starclan show me that? Why were they telling me to not listen to him? Questions flooded my mind but I was taken away from them by a annoyed hiss. "Blackpaw! Are you listening?!?" Shadepaw asked and I shook my head to snap me from my trance.

"W-what?" I asked rubbing my ear with my paws. Shadepaw rolled his eyes and flicked his gaze towards a half eaten hare that lay in the small clearing we stood in. Shadepaw stalked over to the crow food and sniffed at its bloody brown pelt.

"Its not clan cat scents, the rouges must be close to here." Shadepaw mewed and perked his ears at a small vole that was feeding on some berries. The small vole looked skinny and small as it fed on the berries hungerly.

I remembered the vole that Silentpaw had fed on our way to the Moon Hollow and I grinned at the memory of killing one of the baby voles and throwing the prey into the SilverPelt river that laid just behind us.

Shadepaw flicked his tail to me and I started stalking the small vole when the bushes just on the side of Shadepaw started shaking

violently and a cat jumped from behind it and leaped straight over Shadepaw with a powerful leap and landed straight on top of the vole and swiftly killed it with one swipe.

The only thing I could make out about the cat was her very bright green eyes before a yowl split my ears and I saw another cat pinning down Shadepaw.

The cat was a huge fluffy she-cat with a silver and black pelt and dark blue eyes. I was about to run to the she-cat to help Shadepaw when the bright green eyed cat shoved me to the ground.

"Let go of me now! Do you know who I am?!? I am of Shadowclan you flee pelt!" Yowled Shadepaw trying to swipe at the silver and black she-cats muzzle.

The green eyes she-cat snorted and let go of me, "Clan cats.." The she-cat snarled before nodding to the she-cat holding down Shadepaw and she let go of Shadepaw who ran to my side with a snarl at the silver and black she-cat.

Me and Shadepaw faced our rivals and I realized that these two she-cats almost looked the exact same. Besides the green eyed she-cat having Black legs with a silver pelt while the dark blue eyes she had a silver and black pelt kind of like Ivypaws.

The two she-cats stood side by side and glared at me and Blackpaw, "Hello clan flees." Mewed the green eyed she-cat dipping her head, "My name is Moon and this is my sister Midnight." Moon mewed flicked her tail towards her sister.

Moon when held her head high and narrowed her eyes at me and Shadepaw, "What are you clan kits doing in rouge territory?" Moon hissed and I felt Shadepaws pelt flatten against my own.

Shadepaw caught my gaze before he spoke, "We have come to see how you rouges live!" Shadepaw mewed firmly. Moon and Midnight shared a puzzled gaze before both the she-cats started yowling with laughter.

My ears flattened as the she-cats laughed at us and after awhile and

lots of annoyed hisses from Shadepaw the she-cats came back to reality. "You two want to know how we rouges live? How do we know your not just trying to see how many of us there are so your clans can attack us?" Midnight rasped still some laugh in her mew.

Shadepaws eyes burned into Midnight and Moons pelt and he spoke again firmly and confident, "We want to help your rouges. We may only be apprentices but we can tell you the information of the clans you need to know." Shadepaw mewed and I turned to the rouges with a nod of agreement.

Moon and Midnight snickered and Shadepaw was getting annoyed when a idea popped into my mind, "Do you rouges know of the Moon Hollow?" I asked and this caught the attention of Shadepaw, Midnight, and Moon.

"You mean that river that Foxscar has been trying to get his paws on?" Moon asked and snorted. "That tom has been looking for something with moon in its name since we got to the Mountain Range!" Midnight added.

Moon turned to me and Shadepaw with a nod, "If we get praised for bringing you to camp and giving us this information I will bring you two the best fresh kill in our piles for a moon." Moon mewed and flicked her tail for us to follow.

Midnight fell into step at the rear while Moon lead us towards the land that I noticed was adove Skyclan territory.

Shadepaw gave me a nod of approval and my ear tips burned but I brushed it off saying it was the wind hurting my ears.

We soon stopped in the center of a small clearing, Moon turned and looked past me and Shadepaw to Midnight and gave her a nod before walking out of the clearing and I smelled the strong scent of rouges all around us which overwhelmed me.

Midnight came to Shadepaws side and sat down, she yawned before looking towards the sky.

After some moments of waiting Moon bushed back into the small

clearing while being followed by a large black tom with white stripes and hazel eyes. *Fang?!?* I remembered Mallowtail telling Finchstar about a large black tom with white stripes named fang being one of the cats who attacked him, Dawnsky, Silentpaw, and Leafpaw during a hunting patrol.

Fang turned his deep gaze to me and Shadepaw before mewing a soft, "Welcome, clan cats."

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A/n: HELLO BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE!!! I'm here to tell you that we have a Instagram account and TikTok account. Links are in our bio :3

- Caption

20 | talons

4/10

L E A F

"We're going to a bird hunting session." Was the first thing Dawnsky told me when I exited my den. I stopped in my tracks and tilted my head in confusion clearly mistaking the word "bird". I've already learned how to hunt birds, in fact every apprentices here have so what did Dawnsky mean by that?

When Dawnsky saw the confusion written all over my face, she sighed and twitched her ear. "It's not any regular hunting session. I've decided that you've finally reached the time to take the journey up the mountains to hunt hawks and eagles of such. As you know, Skyclan takes in the ability of jumping to high places, and for the past sessions we've been doing, I've pushed you to work harder for this exact reason." She paused before continuing. "Skyclan relies on huge birds to feed the clan but also to eliminate the threat. Every apprentice must go on a hunting session at least once during apprenticeship before warriorship."

My eyes widened. "No way, really?!" My fur spiked out from the excitement that started to burn through my pelt. *No way, I'm going over to the mountains?* I lashed my tail in response.

However, Dawnsky didn't look as excited as I was. Instead she looked anxious.

"Keep in mind that this journey is very dangerous!" she snapped. "Hawks and eagles are huge birds that can easily prey on inexperienced cats like you. For this session, you must keep your eyes and ears alert, this is no time to celebrate."

"Oh I see. I'm sorry." My tail drooped a bit slightly but even Dawnsky's harsh words weren't enough to disperse my spirits.

"Is it just me going?" I questioned. Dawnsky shook her head.

"No, Silentpaw and Mallowtail are coming with us along with a few other warriors."

"I'm gonna go tell her! Bye!" Dawnsky blinked at me and sighed as I whirled around and sprinted across the camp, ran up the Rockslide and over to where Mallowtail and Silentpaw sat talking. From the way Silentpaw's eyes lit up, I knew that he was telling the same information that Dawnsky told me.

"No way! A hunting session!" Silentpaw squealed and jumped to her paws, her eyes filled with excitement only to get yelled at by Mallowtail. I squared my shoulders, not understanding why our mentors were getting so heated up when we got excited.

"Hey Silentpaw!" I called out, halting just a few fox-tail length away from the two. Silentpaw turned to face me.

"Oh hey! Did you hear—"

"Yes I did," I mewed, my voice wavering both with excitement and nervousness.

"It sounds fun even though Mallowtail says its not," Silentpaw whispered, her eyes flickering over to where Mallowtail had gotten up and was making his way down the Rockslide.

"So did Dawnsky but I'm sure they're not wrong. It definitely sounds dangerous," I pointed out. Just then, Finchstar bounded out of her den and padded over to the edge of the Meeting Rock and yowled for Skyclan to join there. Silentpaw and I shared a look before scrambling down the Rockslide.

Cats appeared from their dens, some groggy with tiredness and some bright with energy. I noticed Stoneheart and Leapflight padding over to the meeting center, their pelt brushing as they walked side by side. I then took notice of Leapflight's belly which seemed to be more round than usual. My eyes widened slightly as I faced Finchstar.

Finchstar waited for everyone to head over to the meeting center.

Once everyone was there, she stepped forward.

"Cats of Skyclan, dire times have fallen upon our shoulders," she started, her gaze raking over the cats below her. "It first started with the encounter of the rouges, then the attacks began. We thought that by fighting them off and threatening them would hold them off but they were determined and persistent to break us. And they did. Willownose's death was tragic but like we've said, we hold her close to our heart. The incident at the Gathering Hill was definitely shocking and unexpected—we do not know if Thunderclan sees us as enemy or ally but we do know one thing, all the clans share a common enemy. And us Skyclan cats, we will not cower. We will fight together and stand together."

Cheers arose around the camp at Finchstar's speech while I gazed at the ginger she-cat with admiration glowing in my eyes. I knew that Finchstar was a respectable and wise she-cat but her speech made me feel comforted and motivated.

"I'd also like to happily announce that Stoneheart and Leapflight are expecting kits! Such news are great news for the clan as they will strengthen our hope and the future. Leapflight will be taking duties off as a warrior until her kits are born. Even with Leapflight under the nursery wing, we will be short on warriors. I expect all hard work from everyone because every warriors contribution counts. Our temporary prisoner will now be moved to the apprentice den and I know while this may not seem like a good idea, I have grown to believe that Hawk will obviously not harm anyone." Finchstar raked her gaze over the clan and then nodded when the mewls of protest died down. "Meeting over!"

The group dispersed. Some went over to the entrance, heading out for border patrols while some when up to Stoneheart and Leapflight congratulating the two. Happiness filled through me as I gazed at the tom and she-cat.

Silentpaw poked my ribs causing me to turn away from them and face Silentpaw. I threw her a questioning look but she instead gave my shoulder a nudge toward where Finchstar was now making her way over to Mallowtail and Dawnsky. Finchstar spoke with the two for a few heartbeats until she looked up and turned to look at us.

She then flicked her tail at us, signaling us to come over. Silentpaw and I shared a confused glance before heading over the the ginger she-cat. As we walked over to her, Finchstar had a pleased look on her face.

"I heard you two will be heading out for the raptor hunting session," she mewed. I nodded in response.

"That's good to hear. This will be quite an experience so I decided to accompany both of you. It has been awhile since I last hunted those huge birds."

My fur spiked out as I processed her information. I never thought that Finchstar would be accompanying us. I mean what's the likely hood of your own leader coming to you at a hunting session? If she was coming, there was no way I would mess up. The thought made me nervous yet excited. Silentpaw leaped up and stared at our leader with amaze. "No way! You're coming with us?"

Finchstar raised her eyes and let out a scoff. "Why not? Am I too old is that why?"

Silentpaw's eyes widened while I let out a *mrrow* of laughter. "No! Of course not!" she quickly said, throwing me a glare. "It's just that —"

Finchstar let out an amused purr. "It's fine, Silentpaw. I was only teasing."

Silentpaw ducked her head, embarrassed while I snickered silently beside her. She noticed this and rammed her paw into my ribs making me yelp in surprise and pain. If I weren't in front of Finchstar at the moment, I would've slashed her ears. Instead I hissed and stood where I was, keeping my gaze on Finchstar.

"Well in that case, we should head out as soon as possible," Finchstar mewed.

I frowned. "So soon?" I asked. Dawnsky turned her head and nodded at me.

"The journey is longer and more difficult than you think it is," she

said. "You have to go through the forest to head into the mountains. There you would need to strategize how to attack the birds, and then finally we'd have to drag it back into the camp."

"Sounds grueling," I lamented. Silentpaw let out a snort while Dawnsky simply rolled her eyes.

"Sure. But anyway go to Parsleyseed's den and ask for some herbs to boost your energy," she ordered.

"Okay." Turning around, I prodded Silentpaw. "Lets go."

The two of us bounded to the medicine den side by side. As we neared the mouth of the cave, we saw Ivypaw coming out with herbs in her mouth. She halted when she saw us and her eyes lit up.

"What're you guys doing here?" she asked as she set the bundles of herbs by her paws.

"We came here for herbs cause we're going out for a raptor hunting session," Silentpaw said. Ivypaw looked impressed.

"No way, you guys are heading out to hunt eagles and hawks?" she purred and flicked her tail. "That's so cool. Come in."

Ivypaw disappeared into the den as we followed closely behind her. Parsleyseed was in the corner, pawing the herbs slowly as he muttered things under his breath.

"Parsleyseed?" Ivypaw peered into the side, hoping to catch the brown and white toms attention. Parsleyseed lifted his head and looked at Ivypaw before looking over at us.

"What is it?" he rasped, his voice filled with annoyance.

"Leafpaw and Silentpaw need herbs for their journey," she mewed. Parsleyseed narrowed is his eye at us.

"What journey—oh the raptor hunting I heard about." Parsleyseed sighed before turning to Ivypaw.

"What herb is needed for replenishing energy?" Parsleyseed

inquired. Ivypaw frowned and thought for a moment before her eyes sparked up.

"Burnet!" she exclaimed.

Parsleyseed sat back, obviously pleased. "Good, now go find the correct one."

Ivypaw walked up to the storage and nosed herself into the cracks where the herbs were stored. She then came back holding medium green-colored basal leaves which I assumed it to be burnet. She dropped it down at our paws and ordered us to eat it.

I sniffed the leaves and wrinkled my nose at the smell though it wasn't like I could refuse to eat it. I licked it up and stuck out my tongue in disgust.

"Yuck!" Silentpaw growled. Ivypaw purred before she touched both our noses with hers. She then stepped back and nudged us out of the den.

"Now quick," she ordered. "Go along to your session."

"We will, thanks!" I called and padded out of the den and hurried over to where Dawnsky, Mallowtail, Honeywisp, and Stoneheart were all waiting.

"Did you guys take the herbs?" Mallowtail prompted.

"Yep we did," Silentpaw meowed. "Though they were yucky."

"Well the good thing is that you took them," Mallowtail said and flicked his ear as Finchstar made her way over to us. I stood a little taller as did Silentpaw.

"Are we ready?" Finchstar asked, halting in front of us.

"Yes, we are," Mallowtail informed.

"Let's go then," Finchstar said and then she pushed her way through the entrance. Stoneheart followed along with Mallowtail and Dawnsky right behind. We walked behind them while Honeywisp

walked in the rear. The patrol slipped through the entrance and we began our journey up to the mountains.

"How far is are the mountains?" I asked, looking around and catching a glimpse of the peaks of the mountains. Honeywisp who was walking behind us responded.

"It's quite far but the mountains aren't as far as you think they are. In fact, we're actually living on the mountains but on a lower level."

"Really? I never knew that," Silentpaw meowed, surprise evident in her voice.

"There's a lot of things we don't know," Honeywisp said. "But to us, the mountain territory is an advantage to us though the other clans have adapted to the mountains just not as well as us."

I let out a murmur of agreement. As Silentpaw padded beside me, I took note of how much bigger she had gotten. When waking side by side, she was just a few inches taller than me.

"Great starclan, you've definitely have gotten bigger, you big lump of flat-eared furball," I muttered. Silentpaw winced and shook her head.

"Can you be a bit more meaner? You missed a few parts of my heart," she hissed. I simply rolled my eyes.

We continued our journey through the forrest until the peaks of the mountains became more clearer and the territory became more rockier. Luckily for us, we had harder pads that made it easy for us to scramble over the rocky pathways without hurting our paws or making them sore.

The trees soon dispersed into jagged rocks and we then came across a ridge. The place was cut off from the other side; the gap was only a few fox-tail length. I assumed that the huge gap meant a huge endless dark pit that meant death if you fell over.

"Are we jumping over to the other side?" I asked, turning to face the other warriors.

Mallowtail shook his head. "No, not today. It's more dangerous on the other side and I'm not sure how we'll drag a huge bird across that gap."

"We mostly stick on this side unless we do small huntings on the other," Stoneheart explained.

"That's right," Finchstar mewed. "Let's head further up."

The ginger she-cat walked down the narrow side within the mountain. She took a sharp left which led up to a rocky ramp that slowly rose higher and higher up the mountains. My stomach dropped as I twisted my head to get a view of how far the path took.

It was very long.

"Let's go," Dawnsky prompt. I forced my legs to move and up the path. The higher we went, the steeper the path gotten. And rockier. The warriors didn't seem to mind it though—in fact they acted like it was normal.

For me and Silentpaw, it was a bit more difficult since we've never climbed a mountain before. We had gotten use to the Rockslide in our camp but obviously this was more different. Even so, climbing the mountain wasn't as that hard as I expected it to be. Perhaps all the pervious training done before helped shape me up for something like this.

We climbed up until the pay gave away into a bare large open space. The place was a smooth and a few jagged rocks sat on the edge. On the end was nothing but an open gap.

"So what now?" Silentpaw asked loudly. Honeywisp flicked her tail.

"Just wait and see," she mewed and walked over to where the older warriors were talking. We followed Honeywisp.

"We need one warrior to head out into the open," Dawnsky said.

"I'll go," Stoneheart offered but Dawnsky cut him.

"No, you have kits to worry about. We don't need you to throw yourself at a bird and risk getting terribly injured."

Stonheart looked like he was about to argue but held his tongue.

"I'll do it," Dawnsky declared. My stomach dropped. Above us, I could hear the screeches of the huge birds that was circling the sky, ready to prey on any prey it could see.

"No," Mallowtail said firmly. I was sure I was imagining the protectiveness in his voice. "You'll be better off by attacking them."

"But—"

"Great starclan why are we fighting over this?" Honeywisp snapped. "*I'll* do it. I'm better off at it since I have some experience from doing it." She turned and faced Finchstar, as if she was hoping for her approval or for her to jump in and tell her not to. However the ginger she-cat nodded at Honeywisp, eyes glowing softly.

"Very well," she mewed. "Just be careful."

Honeywisp looked somewhat disappointed and surprised. Nonetheless she began walking into the open. I felt Silentpaw go tense beside me.

"What is she doing?" I hissed, my claws scraping the smooth rock under my paws.

"She'll be acting like an injured prey to attract the birds attention," Mallowtail explained.

"How?" Silentpaw asked.

"Just watch."

Honeywisp was now in the clear open—she was no longer walking. Instead she was limping and gasping for breath. And then she threw her head back and let out a piercing yowl that seemed to echo through the mountains.

My ears went flat against my head while Silentpaw let out a low

growl. Everyone was crouching low, hidden and out of sight. But also positioned so that they can launch forward if a raptor comes.

Honeywisp collapsed and held her "injured" paw before letting out another screech. Her screech seemed to have echoed stretched past the mountains.

And that's when I took notice of a huge falcon circling right above Honeywisp. I crouched low and bunched my muscles.

"Hold on," Finchstar whispered. "Wait until the falcon is low enough."

The falcon dropped down to Honeywisp who let out another yowl. It flapped it's wing and revealed its sharp talons that was reaching toward the pale ginger she-cat. I swallowed tightly as I watched the scene unfold. I felt jittery over the fact that we weren't going yet.

Just as the falcon was about to grab Honeywisp, Finchstar launched forward. "Attack!" she cried.

The rest of the warriors bursted out from the shadows and ran across the empty clearing and headed over to the falcon. Silentpaw and I shared a quick look before pelting after them. The falcon let out a shriek and grabbed Honeywisp, digging their piercing claws into her pelt. Honeywisp let out a yowl as it gripped her and began dragging her off.

"No!" Finchstar snarled and flung herself at the falcons face. She spat and slashed her claws on its face leaving bloody marks across its cheeks. Stoneheart leaped forward and grabbed the falcon by the wing while Dawnsky targeted the other one. Mallowtail neatly sprang over to the falcons back and began clawing it. The falcon screeched and bucked as cats attack it from all sides.

I ran over to where Honeywisp was violently struggling against the falcon's claws.

"Help!" she gasped. "It's grip on me is tight and it's not letting go!"

Silentpaw yowled and ripped her claws against the falcon's legs. I jerked forward and bit down on the falcon's leg as hard as I could. It

let out a shriek of pain and finally let go out Honeywisp where her body crashed to the ground and lay unmoving.

I grabbed the pale ginger she-cat by the scruff and began hauling her away from the scene. I laid her down and examined her wounds. There were two deep holes and gnashes.

"Cobwebs stop bleeding," I blurted out, remembering Ivypaw's lesson I heard previously when I entered her den. Silentpaw whipped around and quickly disappeared into the bushes. I bent down and began licking Honeywisp's wound.

Honeywisp lifted her head and let out a sigh of relief when she saw me. "Good seeing you," she joked.

"Shut up and let me treat your wound," I mumbled. Silentpaw then appeared with a wad of cobwebs. She limped over to Honeywisp and laid them over her wounds and pressed on them so they would get soaked.

"One of a few perks of having a medicine cat friend," I say which earned a purr of laughter from Honeywisp. I took a step back.

"You're all good," I tell her. Honeywisp let out a sigh.

"Great starclan, that hurted. Thank you," she mewed. I opened my mouth to respond but a sudden cry made me snap my head toward that direction. My eyes widened as I saw a hawk flapping towards Finchstar who had her back towards the bird. The bird swooped down and stretched its talons toward the she-cat.

"Finchstar!" I yowled. "Watch out!"

Finchstar turned her head towards me but the warning was too little to late. The hawk swooped down and grabbed Finchstar by the back and hauled her backwards. Finchstar let out a scream of horror and pain as she was dragged backwards.

Honeywisp gasped but I beat her to it. "Stay here, you're injured!"

"But Finchstar—"

"Silentpaw and I will help her." I faced Silentpaw. "Let's go!"

Turning around, I sprinted over Finchstar as fast as I can. Stoneheart, Dawnsky, and Mallowtail were still struggling to fight the falcon though I could tell they wanted to help Finchstar. I forced my paws to move faster as I watched Finchstar being dragged over to the edge of the cliff.

"Fox dung!" Silentpaw snarled beside me.

I crouched down and bunched my muscles before leaping onto the hawk's wing. It let out a shriek and tried to flap it's other wing but Silentpaw jumped right on time and clawed it's wing.

My forepaws were gripping the hawk's wing while my lower body hung low, jerking as the hawk fought ferociously. Growling, I snapped my head forward and sunk my fangs into the hawk's out wing. As I did, I could hear the painful crunch of the one being crushed and blood splattering across my face.

I gasped as I felt the hawk flap its wing throwing me off balance. I cry out as I thrown backwards from the force and crashed onto the ground, luckily. My vision blurred for a second along with a high pitched ringing in my ears. I shook it off and struggled to get to my paws. Just as I did, I saw a flash of ginger from the side of my vision. I quickly looked up and saw Honeywisp leaping over the hawk's head and over to it's back.

She's gonna kill herself, I thought. Lashing my tail, I limped over to the hawk and once again threw myself at the hawk's legs. I had to get the hawk off Finchstar.

I lashed my paws and sunk them into the scaly legs. The hawk let out another shriek but refused to let go of Finchstar.

"Fox dung!" I snarled, gripping the scales.

"Do it again!" Silentpaw yowled over to me. She was crouching on the ground, aiming at the battered wing she had damaged. "Keep attacking it!"

Gasping, I turn around and once again flung myself at the legs. At

this point, Finchstar had stopped writhing and lashing. She was lying still and limp with blood smearing her entire back and stomach. My stomach dropped at the sight. But what was worse was the fact that the hawk was refusing to let go of Finchstar.

"It's still trying to drag her off the cliff!" Honeywisp wailed.

"I won't let it," I hissed and lurched forward, sinking my fangs deep into the scales, choking back the disgusting taste of bone and blood. There was a screech and then finally, *finally*, the hawk dropped Finchstar's body.

My eyes widened in relief as I clung onto the hawk.

"Finchstar!" Mallowtail yowled. I watched as Dawnsky, Mallowtail, and Stoneheart run over to us. Behind them, I saw the falcon lying limp on the ground. They didn't stir once.

"Leafpaw, Silentpaw, Honeywisp! Get down, immediately!" Mallowtail ordered, his voice raw and sharp. He didn't even need to finish his sentence as my grip loosened and I slid off the hawk's legs, hitting the ground with a thump.

Behind me, I heard Dawnsky crying out my name. I heard another thump of a body falling following a series of footstep.

"Silentpaw!" I heard Stoneheart yelling.

I blinked for a moment as my blurred vision slowly went away. I saw Dawnsky leaning over me with a concerned look in her eyes.

"Are you okay?" she asked anxiously.

I nodded. "I just feel sore but other than that I feel fine."

Dawnsky let out a relieved sigh but it soon turned into anger. "Mouse-brain! What do you think you were doing putting yourself into danger like that?! Let alone the fact you are completely inexperienced."

"Well I'm experienced now," I joked which only earned a soft cuff around my ears. "Wait—how's Finchstar? And Silentpaw? And what

about Honeywisp—"

"Calm down, Leafpaw." Dawnsky nudged my shoulder, signaling me to get up. I quickly got to my paws and turned around over to where Mallowtail, Stoneheart, and Honeywisp were gathered.

"Leafpaw!" Silentpaw cried out. She hurried over from where she was and quickly rubbed her cheek against mine. "Oh thank starclan you're okay."

I purred but quickly pulled back. "Are you okay?"

Silentpaw nodded. "I am but Finchstar's not."

"What do you mean?"

"She lost a life," Dawnsky said, her voice hard. "She lost a lot of blood."

"I found some cobweb like before but it wasn't enough," Silentpaw murmured.

"Don't blame yourself, Silentpaw," I tell her, my voice soft. I touch my nose to her ear. "I don't think anyone could've saved her from losing a life."

The three of us headed over to where Finchstar laid unmoving. Honeywisp was sitting next to her, her eyes clouded with grief. I walked over to her and pressed my nose against her shoulder.

"Hey, you alright?"

Honeywisp shook her head. "No. It's not."

"Finchstar will be okay," I said, trying to comfort the she-cat.

"It's—it's not that," she mumbled. "It's just that today I wanted to impress her so hard that I got blinded. I thought she never cared about anything I did or showed any interest in my progress but today she actually did. Maybe I'm hallucinating or something but I constantly have to feel like I have to impress her. And that she expects me to do better."

"Did you ever tell her how you feel?" I ask. "I'm sure talking to her will help."

Honeywisp snorted. "Why should I? She neglected me ever since I was a kit and never cared about my apprenticeship and nothing I accomplished. She didn't even care when I lay bleeding!"

I touch my tail comfortingly on Honeywisp's shoulder. "You don't know that. The only way for you to know is to talk to her."

"Not now, at least," she muttered.

"That's okay. You can talk to her when you feel like it. But don't assume she doesn't care."

Honeywisp sighed but didn't say anything more. Just then, Finchstar's still body stirred capturing everyones attention.

"Give her some space," Mallowtail ordered harshly. Everyone took a step back but stood on the edge of their paws, in worry for their leader.

Finchstar lifted her head and blinked a few times. Her chest heaved as she panted for breath.

"Finchstar!" Mallowtail exclaimed. "Are you alright?"

"I suppose I look alright," she managed out, wincing in doing so. Mallowtail shook his head as he helped her up.

"This is no time to be joking." He then looked up and flicked his tail at me and Silentpaw. "I want you two to help Finchstar. The rest of us will bring the falcon back to the camp."

The two of us hurried to one side of Finchstar and kept close as she began limping out. "Thank you both Leafpaw and Silentpaw," she mewed as we moved out of the open space. "If it weren't for you two jumping in, I would've been a goner."

I felt my ear tips burn. "I'm glad we were at least able to help."

"Yep! Now we totally impressed you," Silentpaw meowed loudly.

Finchstar let out a purr of laughter.

"Yes, you definitely did."

* * *

Once we returned back to camp, we were swarmed by shocked and worried cats. Parsleyseed and Ivypaw were both summoned to the crowd and were horrified to see two huge claw marks over Finchstars back and her belly. The two then ushered her to her den.

Mouseclaw came over to us and gave us both licks all over the face.

"Are you two alright?" he meowed, his voice filled with worry about his daughters. I nodded and pressed closer to his brown pelt, feeling wary and exhausted. Silentpaw sat beside Mouseclaw and also pressed close to him

I watched as Honeywisp over to Swiftleap who's eyes widened in shock at the sight of her. He hurried over to her and fiercely pressed his muzzle against hers and gave her ears licks before pressing to her side protectively. Stoneheart bounded over to the nursery where Leapflight lay in the sunlight, basking in the sunlight and warmth. Her eyes softened as she saw her mate and hurried over to him before touching nose with him and intertwining their tails together.

"You two should go see Ivypaw and Parsleyseed for those scratches you two have," Mouseclaw urged. I nodded and got up.

Well, today was one huge of an adventure.

***

AHHHHH OMG THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR 1K VIEWS ON OUR BOOK!!!! it means so much that this book is getting views and recognition <333

thank you to all who are reading this book and supporting it! once again thank you for 1k, ily all mwah <3

- Foxy

Allegiance — Part Three

SkyClan

LEADER: Finchstar - ginger she-cat with green eyes

DEPUTY: Mallowtail - pale ginger tom with white flecks along the pelt
Apprentice, Silentpaw (red molly with lighter reddish orange legs & tails with folded ears)

MEDECINE CAT: Parsleyseed - white tom with brown patches
Apprentice, Ivypaw (black and silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes)

WARRIORS:

Cloudfur - white tom with a graying muzzle and amber eyes

Stoneheart - gray tabby tom with light blue eyes

Embernose - black tom with blue eyes

Mouseclaw - dark brown tom with light brown stripes and hazel eyes

Petalshade - silver she-cat with sky blue eyes

Ravenwing - sleek black tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Blackpaw (black tom with long matted fur)

Snowpebble - gray tom with white paws and tail with light brown eyes

Dawnsky - black and white tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Leafpaw (dark reddish tabby she-cat with green-blue eyes)

Swiftleap - lean, muscular black tom with white paws and

underbelly

Honeywisp - pale ginger she-cat with light brown eyes

Hawk - White calico she-cat with black and gold markings with fluffy fur and forest green eyes (temporary rouge prisoner)

QUEENS:

Leapflight - light brown she-cat with strong hind legs (expecting Stoneheart kits)

ELDERS:

Foxwhisker - dark red tom with hazelu eyes

Flowerheart - white she-cat with a black tail and dark amber eyes

Flakenose - gray and white tabby she-cat with swirl patterns and blue eyes

Shadowclan

LEADER: Thistlestar - black and white tom with red patches

DEPUTY: Rosewillow - cream brown she-cat with a bushy tail

MEDICINE CAT: Beestripe - white she-cat with yellow stripes

WARRIORS:

Lilywhisper - silver and black tortoiseshell she-cat with light green eyes

Talonclaw - Brown tom with scars over his pelt

Puddlespot - brown and white tom

Lilywhisper - silver and black tortoiseshell she-cat with light green eyes

Silvermist - silver she-cat with dark gray patches and bright green eyes

Icestorm - white she-cat with a black chest and a bushy tail
Apprentice, Smokepaw (brown tabby she-cat with lighter stripes and blue eyes)

Pinethistle - stocky brown tom with darker brown legs sharp
Apprentice, Thornpaw (large, dark brown tom with lighter stripes and matted fur)

Oakstep - black tom with a short tail and thick fur around his neck
Apprentice, Nightpaw (dark gray molly with ash blue eyes)

Sedgecreek - Dappled golden tabby she cat with black ears and flecked green eyes

Stormsight - dark gray tom with white legs and green eyes

Lakedance - gray tabby she-cat with black flecks

Shaderock - black tom with white under belly and legs and white tipped tail

QUEENS:

Brindlestone - soft furred, light grey tabby she-cat with brown eyes (mother of Pinethistle kits: Maplekit, brown she-kit with brindle stripes; Aspenkit, tortoiseshell tom with light yellow eyes)

ELDERS:

Tansyleg - white tom with golden patches and green eyes

Patchfur - brown tom with grey ears and paws

Tawneyflick - ginger and black she-cat with yellow eyes

ThunderClan

LEADER: Ashstar - dark grey tom with stocky legs and dark green eyes

DEPUTY: Flashleap - tortoiseshell tom with brown spots and hazel eyes

MEDICINE CAT: Hazelberry - dark brown she-cat with a lighter underbelly and yellow eyes

Mistcreek - grey tom with long legs and white paws and muzzle

WARRIORS:

Creekpool - golden dappled she-cat with hazel eyes

Brookwater - dappled gray she-cat with hazel eyes
Apprentice, Breezepaw (dark gray tabby tom with blue eyes)

Bumblenose - ginger tom with white legs and amber eyes
Apprentice, Snakepaw (bright ginger she-cat with striking green eyes)

Wolftalon - long furred, grey tom with blue eyes

Sandstep - cream tabby she-cat with white paws and underbelly and dark brown eyes
Apprentice, Rowanpaw (white tom with ginger patches)

Sunnyshine - bright ginger tabby she-cat

Littlefoot - small black tom with a stump for a tail

Palestripe - light brown she-cat with swirls and dark blue eyes

Scorchsun - dark tom with a faded tail and white muzzle

Toadstrike - gray tom with emerald green eyes

Cherryflare - pale ginger and white she-cat with darker ginger stripes

QUEENS:

ELDERS:

Yellowheart - yellow tom

Shadenose - a dark grey tabby she-cat with one eye

Lizardstripe - brown tom with a gray muzzle with nearly deaf ears

RiverClan

LEADER: Minnowstar - light gray she-cat with darker gray paws and underbelly with green eyes

DEPUTY: Ottervine - dusky brown tom and yellow eyes

MEDICINE CAT: Badgerheart - white and black tom with amber eyes

WARRIORS:

Riversight - blueish gray she-cat with blue green eyes
Apprentice, Icepaw(jet black tom with white paws and green eyes)

Aspenfall - white tom with a grayish black tail and amber eyes
Apprentice, Flowerpaw(white she-cat with black patches and light blue eyes)

Mistyflower - white and black tortoiseshell she-cat with a gray muzzle and amber eyes

Timbershade - black tom with green eyes

Berryhaze - ginger tom with white paws and under belly with amber eyes

Crowhiss - jet black tom with light blue eyes

Lilacheart - white she-cat with green eyes

Pondleap - Brown she-cat with darker brown stripes on her legs and yellow eyes

Reednose - grayish blue tom with blue eyes

Foxflip - ginger she-cat with green eyes

Echoriver - grayish white tom with blue eyes

QUEENS:

Tinystep - golden she-cat with white stripes along her flank and dashing green eyes (Applekit, golden she-kit with black spots and light green eyes; Sapkit, golden, white, and black she-kit with green eyes)

ELDERS:

Sparrowfang - cranky old tom with a light gray pelt and yellow eyes

Speckledclaw - Dusky brown she-cat with amber eyes

Ambersky - ginger she-cat with amber eyes

WindClan

LEADER: Thymestar - Gray tom with Darker gray flank and green eyes

DEPUTY: Havenfern - Brown she-cat with darker brown stripes and yellow eyes

MEDICINE CAT: Marigoldleaf - golden she-cat with sky blue eyes
Apprentice, Squirrelpaw (ginger she-cat with dark ginger stripes and amber eyes)

WARRIORS:

Ferngaze - pale grey she-cat with darker stripes and smooth pads

Ashcloud - gray tom with dark gray flank and blue eyes

Rabbitfoot - Brown tom with darker brown spots on his flank with yellow eyes

Ivywillow - Brown she-cat with white paws and amber eyes
Apprentice, Gingerpaw (ginger and white tom with blue eyes)

Duskstream - tortoiseshell and white she-cat with amber eyes

Lichensplash - Black tom with brown eyes

Featherfern - white she-cat with dark gray stripes and honey-brown eyes

Eagletail - Ginger tom with amber eyes

Mintleaf - white she-cat with blue eyes

Valleydawn - light brown she-cat with amber eyes

Kestrelsong - black tom with gray paws and spots and brown eyes

QUEENS:

Frostbite - whitish gray she-cat with dark gray flecks and green eyes (mother of Ashcloud kits; Softkit, light gray she-kit with paler stripes and dashing blue eyes; Harekit, white tom with gray patches and tail with green eyes)

ELDERS:

Windheart - old Black tom with a gray muzzle and blue eyes

Mossstep - old tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes

Rouges

LEADER: Ezekiel - dark ginger tom with long matted fur and scars covering his flank and yellow eyes

DEPUTIES: Fang - black tom with white stripes and hazel eyes

Foxscar - black tom with darker gray stripes and a huge scar running from his eyes to his flank, shredded ears and scars over his back with yellow eyes

MEMBERS:

Scarlett - black long furred molly with long claws and usual red eyes

Apple - Reddish brown she-cat with dark yellow eyes

Coal - Black tom with shredded ears and light blue eyes

Ranger - dappled gray tom with aqua green eyes

Moon - Silver she cat with black legs and very light green eyes (sister: midnight)

Midnight - Silver and black molly with dark blue eyes

Flint - ginger and black tom with a torn ear and white tail tip

Prickle - a light grey spikey furred she-cat with blue eyes

Half-face - a bulky, muscular light brown tom with half of its face torn and shredded

Snowflake - white she-cat with green eyes with grey spots flecking her pelt

Flick - mottled dark brown tom with light brown paws and yellow eyes

Matt - light brown tom with dark striped legs and amber eyes

Beetle - gray tom with stump for a tail

Hope - white tabby she-cat with tortoiseshell and ginger patches

Freckles - orange and white she-cat with freckles across the muzzle

Toad - brown tom with slick, smooth fur and light brown paws with sky blue eyes

Pepper - a long-furred lilac tortoiseshell tabby she-cat

Ebony - a medium curly-furred cinnamon tortoiseshell tom with white tipped tail with amber eyes

Jack - Gray and black tom with scars all over his legs and torn tail with

Bee - black she-cat with a bob tail and light blue eyes

SHE-CAT WITH KIT(S):

Clove - pale gray-white she-cat with light stripes with a limp
(Forest; light brown tom with long fur and stripes and long claws)

21 | kin

4/15

S I L E N T

A red she-cat crept through the gorse bushes as a small rabbit fed on some berries just a few fox lengths away.

The small white rabbit had red eyes with a light gray belly and paws, the rabbit plucked a blue berry from the bush in front of it and ate it softly while its ears perked as the wind passed by but as it detected no animal was near it let it's ears rest against it's head as it continued to eat.

What the rabbit didn't know was that the red she-cat was creeping closer and closer, her eyes narrowed in hunger and her tail threatened to lash from side to side as the warm smell of the prey tainted her nose.

The red she-cat licked her lips and wiggled her shoulders. The wind passed by once more and just as the rabbit was about to dash for cover in the bushes —

Thud.

"I got it!" I yowled as the rabbit fell limp under my paws. "Good job!" Mallowtail called, the pale ginger tom had another rabbit hung in his jaws as he trotted up to me.

"You've healed quickly." Called a new voice and I whipped around to see Parsleyseed and Ivypaw trotting into the clearing both had fresh smelling herbs in her jaws.

I ducked my head as I met the white toms gaze, Parsleyseed had warned me that hunting could reopen the wound I got during the fight with the eagle and that I should stick to border patrols for a half moon but it was so hard to not hunt for that long!

"Silentpaw just wanted to catch this family of rabbits we found earlier on dawn patrol." Mallowtail mewed to Parsleyseed while

stepping to my side.

Parsleyseed snorted, "Silentpaw should be more careful!" The medicine cat snapped but his gaze softened slightly, "Well, I guess I cant blame her when she has you for a mentor. You and Dawnsky were in my den for what felt like everyday needing to get a thorn out of your paws." Parsleyseed laughed and I chuckled thinking about how Mallowtail, one of the strongest warriors of Skyclan was once a trouble some apprentice with his future mate.

I laughed remembering when I watched Mallowtail and Dawnsky sneak out of the camp one night into the forest alone while I was eating some late night prey in the shadows of the rock slide.

I wonder if Leapfight won't be the only nursing queen in the nursery soon. I thought and smirked, I was kicked away from my thoughts as I felt a pelt at my side and saw Ivypaw, "Hi!" The silver and black apprentice mewed excitedly.

"Hi!" I copied while picking up my rabbit. "Silentpaw, lets take this prey back to camp, the elders are more thirsty for rabbits these days." Mallowtail mewed and gave Parsleyseed a nod before starting to walk towards camp.

"I'll catch up with you later Ivypaw!" I mewed and started to follow after Mallowtail, "Ok! See you and Leafpaw later!" Ivypaw called back and I waved my tail in goodbye.

Just as I pushed through the entrance of the thorn tunnel I scanned the clearing to try to find Leafpaw or Mouseclaw but they were no where to be found. Mallowtail placed his fresh kill in the pile before he trotted up the rockslide path to meet Finchstar who was laid outside of her den.

Hawk was Resting outside of the apprentice den and I noticed Cloudfur and Snowpebble casting hostile glares towards the calico she-cat and I wanted to snarl at the two toms but I kept my mouth shut as I hurried to give the elders their rabbit.

As I was about to enter the elders den a familiar scent caught my attention and I slithered inside the elders den to see Mouseclaw and

Leafpaw quietly talking with Foxwhisker while Flowerheart and Flakenose slept on the other side of the den.

I dropped the rabbit on the ground to gain the attention of someone and Mouseclaws eyes lit up as he saw me, "Silentpaw come, Foxwhisker is telling us a story." Mouseclaw mewed happily and I tilted my head and gave Leafpaw a look of confusion.

Leafpaw returned my gaze with sharp narrowed eyes which told me to sit down and listen. I sat down at Leafpaws side as Foxwhisker started to speak, "Any cat can tell that Leafpaw and Silentpaw are as confused as a flying badger." Foxwhisker laughed in his usual raspy tone.

The dark red tom sat up and gave us a smile, "Young apprentices, I know I have never really been in your life but now that I see that your father is grieving I want to step up, as I should have many moons ago." Foxwhisker mewed softly.

And looked towards Mouseclaw who was looking back at him. I stared at the two toms in confusion, "What do you mean Foxwhisker?" Asked Leafpaw and Mouseclaw laughed.

"Have you apprentices never noticed the resemblance between us?" Foxwhisker asked and I realized what he meant.

Mouseclaw and Willownose both had brown pelts while me and Leafpaw had red pelt, just like Foxwhisker. "Your genetics came from me young cats! I'm Mouseclaws father, I know I haven't been the best, but now I want to know my son. And I'm so proud of him and where he is now." Foxwhisker explained and Mouseclaw turned to me and Leafpaw.

"I'm sorry I've never told you two who my father was, it just never crossed my mind." Mouseclaw explained while he and Leafpaw stared at him in shock.

"We have more kin?!?" Leafpaw yowled and a hiss came from Flowerheart, "Shush! Some cats are trying to sleep!"

"I guess it makes sense." I mewed quietly while pushing my rabbit

towards Foxwhisker. "Lets share this catch as kin, huh?" Foxwhisker asked and me and Leafpaw both nodded slowly.

* * *

"Come on Silentpaw! Higher! Higher!" I heard Foxwhisker yowl from below the tree.

The elder had suggested that we all go down to the training hollow so Foxwhisker could see me and Leafpaws moves and if our mentors were training us right in his words.

Foxwhisker wanted to see how high me and Leafpaw could climb so now I was in a tree taller then the rock slide path while Leafpaw was in a tree across from me about the same height.

I looked down back towards Foxwhisker and Mouseclaw who both looked back up at me. "Silentpaw you can come down if you want too!" Mouseclaw yowled as I stopped and looked down.

"I'm fine!" I yowled back and continued my way up the tree.

By now Mouseclaw and Foxwhisker looked like little ants on the ground as I got higher and higher up the tree, I jumped to my next branch and felt it slightly sway under me.

I dug my claws deeper into the bark and hissed in panic, I'd never been this high before and Mallowtail would always say a cat should never over step their limits unless it's life or death.

I looked over towards Leafpaw who was also casting worried glances down at Mouseclaw and Foxwhisker. We were about the same way up our trees and I could tell Leafpaw regretted going as high as much as me.

I'm glad Mouseclaw is not as pushy as Foxwhisker. I thought while readying myself to start to climb down from the tree.

The branch I was on suddenly became to sway more and more and the sound of a painful snap of the branch hissed in my ears. I didn't have time to think before the branch under me started to snap more and more.

I yowled in panic as the branch snapped one last time and it flew hitting the side of the tree. I dug my claws into the branch for dear life as it swayed, I could now hear the panicked yowls of my kin as I saw the branch about to snap its final string when I felt a sharp sting in my scruff.

I hissed in pain and panic as the branch fell under me but something stopped me from falling with it. "Silentpaw!" A voice yowled but I felt my body go limp.

I felt like I was stuck in place as I watched the branch fall, but something was down in the clearing that I didn't recognize. The ground was not in view and as the branch reached the rays of its bright glow I saw it burst into flames. *Fire!?!?*

The clearing had turned to fire and flames and I looked from side to side trying to find Mouseclaw and Foxwhisker but to no avail.

Whoever was holding me up was struggling to keep hold as they yowled my name over and over, I wanted to get to safety but I just couldn't move. My vision blurred as I imagined myself falling with the branch into the flames.

The image of my body falling down with the branch while looking towards the sky as my pelt was burned away with the fierce flames. I saw a swift fury of brown fur pelt up the tree, the swift blur seemed to come from straight out of the fire.

The brown blur then got closer and closer as it reached the branch above my head and I felt myself being lifted up.

My vision was to blurred to see what was happening but I could feel myself being carried down the tree and I could smell the fear scent of the cats around me. I sniffed the air for the acid smell of the fire but it was no more, like it was just a vision, like it was not real.

Soon I felt the touch of soft moss under me and realized I was back to camp. I couldn't tell whos den I was in but I could smell the scent of herbs all around me and a very blurred face of Ivypaw looking down at me.

"Silentpaw?" Ivypaws soft mew spoke close to me and I felt my vision starting to come back to normal. I closed my eyes as the sun rays flashed into the den, Ivypaw noticed this and stepped closer to block the sun rays.

"You were out for awhile." The silver and black she-cat mewed and I heard a grunt of agreement from Parsleyseed who was across the den by his herb store. "Yes, I've seen bad cases of shock before but this one tops them all." The white tom mewed anonymously while looking at me with narrowed eyes.

I shook my head to clear my thought and I remembered the fire, "Wait! Are Leafpaw, Mouseclaw, and Foxwhisker okay? Did they get burned by the fire?!?" I asked panicked and I felt the confused stares of Ivypaw and Parsleyseed.

"Uhh, Silentpaw, what fire?" Ivypaw asked me while side glancing at her mentor, I gulped and explained to them the fire that covered the clearing while I was hanging from the tree.

Parsleyseed had run out of the medicine cat den to Finchstars as soon as I was finished explaining which led to Finchstar, Parsleyseed, Ivypaw, and Mallowtail asking me lots of questions.

I curled into a ball in the corner of the medicine den as Parsleyseed talked quietly with Finchstar and Mallowtail. Ivypaw had finished her work and came over to me, "I know this is weird, but a cat not training to be a medicine cat getting a vision is a big deal." Ivypaw explained while putting fresh herbs on a scratch I got while being carried down the tree.

I stared down at my paws, "I just don't understand, The flames looked and felt so real but they were-"

"A vision." Ivypaw finished and I looked up at the medicine cat, "I just wanted to have some kin time with Leafpaw, Mouseclaw, and Foxwhisker not deal with this weird vision stuff." I mewed while tucking my paws under me.

Ivypaw gave me a look of sympathy before she stood up and walked over to the older cats all talking furiously. "With all do respect,

Silentpaw still is in shock from her almost death. She needs to rest and not deal with this vision right now." Ivypaw mewed sternly and looked towards Parsleyseed.

The older medicine cat sighed before nodding his head in agreement, "Yes Silentpaw is tired and needs rest. We can learn more of the vision soon when she is well rested." Parsleyseed mewed and slightly bowed his head to Finchstar before making his way back to his nest.

Finchstar nodded and was about to leave when she turned back to Ivypaw, "Keep that stern tongue of yours, you'll need it when your the solo medicine cat." Finchstar mewed and ducked out of the den while Mallowtail followed with a nod at us both.

I saw Ivypaws tail lash with excitement but the silver and black she kept her cool and strolled over to me, "Your wounds are not deep at all so you can go off to the apprentice den to rest." Ivypaw mewed and looked towards the exit of the den.

I gave Ivypaw a tired nod before walking out of the medicine den.

As I entered the clearing I saw few cats there, it was mid day and the evening patrols will be out so I didn't expect to see anyone.

I yawned before strolling up the rockslide path towards the apprentice den where I was met with a familiar and comforting scent of Hawk. The calico she-cat was resting in her nest in the darkest and deepest part of the apprentice den.

I laughed slightly before turning to my own nest. I was about to close my eyes when I felt a soft pelt next to mine and Hawks scent washed over me, "Don't talk I know your tired..." Hawk mewed while laying down next to be and starting to groom my messy fur.

"But Leafpaw and Blackpaw will see-"

"Don't worry about them, I'll move before they get in here."

I purred softly before letting my eyes close and falling deep into sleep with the warm fur of Hawk at my side.

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L E A F

The morning was filled with nervousness. I was told yesterday by Dawnsky that we'll be having the assessment she previously mentioned. I was in a nervous havoc—no not from the assessment but from the vision I had a few days ago when I rescued Silentpaw from the fall.

I told Silentpaw about it afterwards and was shocked to learn that she saw the same thing. Fire.

Ever since, I couldn't help but wonder what the fire was about. Did it have to do with Skyclan? Was Skyclan in danger?

A chill ran through my spine. I didn't even want to think about it. But I still couldn't get the images and thought about the fire out of my head.

I was waiting in the camp patiently for Dawnsky after she decided to talk with Mallowtail and the other warriors about the assessment. It turns out that Blackpaw, Silentpaw, and I were all taking it. It was just to see how good we are and how much we've learned. Now thinking about it, we've come a long way since the day we snuck out the camp.

Now here we are learning how to fight off rouges and bring huge birds out of the sky.

Silentpaw had disappeared which I found weird because I saw her around the fresh-kill pile. Lately, I began noticing that whenever we're in the camp, she'll disappear and when she comes back she looks livelier than before. My suspicions had caught up that she was meeting up with someone. But was it the cat that I think it was?

I didn't want to assume because if it wasn't true it'd be weird. But then again, I kept myself sharp. I knew for sure that Silentpaw was hiding something.

But she wasn't the only one hiding things. I was too. A few days ago, I had caught on a patrol that Thornpaw happened to be in. He hissed to me to meet him in three days time and that was today.

Miraculously as I was thinking her, Silentpaw padded over to me.

"Hey you fur ball!" she called out eagerly.

"Where were you?" I suddenly asked. I wanted to get straight to the point but without hinting my suspicions. Silentpaw looked surprised.

"Oh, um, I was cleaning out the nursery," she meowed. "Why?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. You were here then disappeared so suddenly."

"Gotta live up to my name, you know," she teased. I let out a snort of laughter.

"Ah yes and I'll try to live up to mine."

As the two of us happily talked like the close sisters we are, we were then approached by Mallowtail, Dawnsky, Ravenwing, and Blackpaw. We instantly stopped talking and faced them.

"Okay, everything has been decided," Mallowtail mewed. "For your assessments you will be having two sessions. One of them being a hunting and a fighting sessions. For the fighting sessions you will be expected to fight warriors."

"Is this what a warrior assessment will be like?" Blackpaw asked.

"It depends. Most of the time it's hunting," Ravenwing responded.

"Warriors?" I blurted out.

"Yes, the last time we looked you two have fought rouges and

rapotors have you not?" Dawnsky retorted. "This should be no different."

At the mention of the raptors, Blackpaw sent us a small glare. I knew that the black tom was still annoyed over the fact he wasn't allowed to go though Ravenwing assured that he will have one soon. But I think the main reason he wanted to go was because Finchstar went with us.

"Anymore questions?"

The three of us shook our heads.

"Then let's go," Mallowtail meowed and headed toward the entrance. We slipped through and began heading away from the borders and Silverpelt and further into the trees. Even during our apprenticeship, Silentpaw and I never had been *deep* into our territory before. Each clan territory was a big one and with fewer warriors, it was harder to patrol the ones father away. So every once in a while, a bigger patrol was sent into the territory to claim the markers and bring back any reports of what it was like there.

Since that part was most likely undisturbed prey would be plentiful but so would other huge animals like badgers, foxes, raccoons rats, and more. Way more. I shudder and tried not to think of other types of animals that could be a huge threat to us. The elders used to claim that bears and coyotes are more frequent than we coula imagine.

The deeper we ventured, the more livelier the place seemed. Birds chirped and the tree branches swayed, brushing against other branches. Brambles and ivy's along with weeds were overgrowing in these areas. The whole place seemed peaceful and undisturbed.

"Keep your eyes and ears sharp," Ravenwing warned.

"Say if this place is *so* dangerous, why'd ya bring apprentices here?" Silentpaw questioned.

"It's only a matter of time before you have to come to this place," Ravenwing mewed.

"But we are having an assessment," I pointed out. "How are we suppose to lookout for prey and other animals? Won't that just put us in danger?"

"Well, since this is a bigger group and you guys are taking an assessment, it's best if we do it in an area where you haven't done it before. In areas like these, it will train you to be more sharper and being in a bigger group will lower the chances of any of us being heavily injured," Mallowtail explained. He had now stopped walking and faced us.

"So it's kind of like the concept when we went raptor hunting—that an apprentice should come here at least once before warrior ship?"

"Exactly, though the circumstances of why we are here is quite unfavorable."

"Aren't we so lucky?" Silentpaw sneered as she moved along. I couldn't help but agree. We kept walking until Mallowtail decided to stop.

Dawnsky lifted her head and flicked her tongue out while Ravenwing swiveled his head around, his ears pricked.

"Okay I think we can start now," Mallowtail said, flicking his tail. "I want you three to work together in order to hunt down prey."

My jaw dropped. The last thing I expected was to work with Blackpaw. Surprise jolted through and I was unable to hide it as I blinked at Mallowtail. I wasn't the only one surprised—in fact Blackpaw was already growling and throwing glares at us.

Great starclan, someone tell him to shut up already.

"Why?" Silentpaw protested, obviously not too pleased with the idea. Her eyes were narrowed and she had her fur fluffed out.

"Why not?" Mallowtail countered. "Besides, this is an unknown territory for all of you three. Making you three go out separately is very dangerous. This would be a way to lower the chances of you either getting lost or injured."

I hefted a sigh and gave my tail an angry lash. Silentpaw flexed her claws. When none of us said no more, Mallowtail let out a pleased purr. "Well then, hurry along."

I turned around and began to swiftly walked through the forrest with Silentpaw and Blackpaw behind me. We walked for a few in silence until Silentpaw stopped.

"Okay, so now what?" she questioned. "We can't just keep walking forever."

I sighed. "First we need to plan things out."

"Do you have one?" Blackpaw sneered.

"I do!" I snapped and gave my ear an uneasy flick. I thought for a bit. I wasn't sure if we should stay off of trees or not ever since the fire-tree incident. I didn't want it happening again.

"One of us should try find a prey and try to maneuver toward another cats paws."

"So basically a trap," Blackpaw mewed. I nodded. Silentpaw jumped up.

"Easy," she declared. Blackpaw turned his head toward her.

"Sure easy," he mocked. "You haven't even done it and you say it's easy?"

Silentpaw snapped her head toward the black tom. "Oh I'm sure you know it then."

"I never said that."

"Well you sure act like it!"

"Well you're the one acting like an insufferable she-cat," Blackpaw spat.

"Well you are one of the most dumbest, idiotic, fox-hearted furball that has ever walked this place!" Silentpaw snarled. Her lips drawn

back and her claws unsheathe. Blackpaw did the same.

I whirled around, my pelt prickling with annoyance. I was fed up with the two bickering. If we were going to hunt, I needed silence, not mouse-brains. "You two shut up this instant!" I snarled. "Your bickering is going to scare all the prey away and then you twp can go back to your mentors and explain why we couldn't catch anything!"

The two stared at me then reluctantly became quiet. I flicked my tail at them, motioning for them to move. I kept my ears alert, listening for any scuttling noises that could lead to a prey.

"Leafpaw," Silentpaw hissed.

"What?"

She angled her ears to her right and I turned my head and stopped when I saw a rabbit tucked under some brambles, eating away. Blackpaw twitched his ear in response.

"So what do we do?" Silentpaw murmured.

"I'll chase it and lure it—Blackpaw hide underneath that bush over there." I flicked my tail toward the opposite direction where the rabbit was eating. "I'll lure it over to you. Silentpaw hide under those brambles a few fox-tail length away from Blackpaw incase the rabbit veers off, alright?"

The two of them nodded.

"And before you go, please *do not* kill each other, understood?"

The two shared a glare but gave a reluctant nod. I then turned around and began slowly creeping towards the rabbit. It was completely oblivious the fact I was making my way toward it. I tasted the air and made sure the wind was heading the other direction so that my scent wouldn't alert the rabbit.

I kept my tail still and stalked my way over to the rabbit. I knew that rabbit was harder to catch since they are swift and agile. Which is why coordination is important.

I kept creeping towards and when I was close enough to pounce, the rabbit looked up and looked around. It's nose sniffed furiously and then—the wind changed. The rabbit caught my scent instantly and quickly jumped away from the spot. I let out a hiss and leaped near the rabbit. It scrambled backwards and began heading toward the direction where Silentpaw and Blackpaw awaited.

I kept up with the rabbit, making sure to veer it toward where the two cats were hiding. I ran till my legs gave out, allowing the rabbit to skip away. That very instant, Blackpaw jumped out from where he was and leaped on the rabbit. He lifted his paw and quickly brought it down it, killing it instantly.

I caught up to him, panting slightly. I fought to regain my breath as I gave him a nod of approval. "Great catch."

Silentpaw hopped out from where she was and gave both of us an approving nod. "Good one. The coordination was great!"

Blackpaw merely shrugged and picked up the rabbit by the scruff when I heard a rustle. I turned around, expecting our mentors to appear but saw that no one was around.

"What was that noise?" Silentpaw asked, her ears pricked. I averted my gaze around, hoping to catch something but to no avail. Was it prey?

Or perhaps a predator?

The brambles shook and I caught a chittering noises along with paw steps. The chittering was high pitched and sounded like *'rrrrtttt'* mushed together. Then from the bushes two gray bundles of fur padded out. They had a small body along with short legs. They had a small snout and a pointed nose with short pointed ears and striped tail.

"What is that?" Blackpaw growled, unsheathing his claws.

"I think they're raccoons!" Silentpaw exclaimed. "I remember the elders talking about them. We probably went into their territory and uh, killed their prey."

"They can definitely put up a fight," I added as I snatched the rabbit from Blackpaw and flung it under some bush.

The raccoons stared us down with their dark eyes. One of them pulled back its lips and snarled at us while the other one let out small chitters. They talked for a few moments until they turned back toward us.

"Attack!" Blackpaw suddenly yowled, throwing himself at the raccoons.

I lurched forward. "No stop, you mouse-brain!"

Whatever I said had no effect on Blackpaw. He rammed himself forward and raked his claws down on one of the raccoons flank. The other one let out a hiss and threw itself onto Blackpaw's shoulder and dragged him down. Blackpaw let out a snarl and struggled to get free from the raccoons grip.

"Great now look at what this mouse-brain got us into!" Silenpaw muttered before leaping forward. I sprang towards the raccoon that was swiping at Blackpaw's legs; gripping its shoulder and shoving them back. I then quickly recoiled and jumped away.

I had no idea how a raccoon fights or acts so I had to be wary of what it does. The raccoon let out a growl and stumbled its paws. It narrowed its eyes at me and arched its back, showing off their teeth. I took a step back momentarily when the raccoon snapped forward and lodged its claws on my shoulder and ripped it down.

Hot pain seared through my shoulder as I spat out in pain. I limped back and hissed at the raccoon. Behind me, I could hear the yowls and snarls that filled the clearing as Blackpaw and Silentpaw tried to fight off the raccoon.

Where are our mentors? I thought, my mind panicking. I wasn't sure how long we would have to fight out for since Silentpaw and I still have not completely healed after the tree incident. Even as I fought, I could feel my muscles becoming sore.

The raccoon lashed out again and I managed to dodge just in time

as its sharp claw now pierced the empty air. I scrambled backwards and hunched down, bunching up my muscles before springing forward and landing on the raccoons back. I hefted blows around the raccoons flank while it let out growls of annoyance.

"Leafpaw!" A sudden yowl broke out, silencing the hisses and snarls. My head snapped up at the voice which then allowed the raccoon to throw me off. I grunted as I stumbled, trying to regain my footing. Looking up, the pelts of Mallowtail, Dawnsky, and Ravenwing appeared into the clearing. They began swiping at the raccoons and dragged them off of us. I could hear the screeches and chitters from the raccoons before they slowly dispersed off.

"Leafpaw," Dawnsky called out, breaking away from Mallowtail and Ravenwing. Her eyes were rounded with worry. "Are you alright—"

She stopped when her gaze flicked over to my shoulder. Her eyes widened slightly as she leaned forward, giving the wound an anxious sniff.

"It's not too deep," she mewed, rasping her tongue over it. "You'll be okay."

"Where were you guys?" Silentpaw demanded. She was standing next to Blackpaw who equally looked angry toward their mentors.

"During your assessment, Dawnsky and Ravenwing caught a cat scent nearby," Mallowtail explained. "I told them to investigate it and then come back when they find anything. I then came back to you guy and saw that you were chasing after a rabbit so I had to follow until the two came back with their reports and I lost track of you guys momentarily. I apologize for us not being there when needed but the issue at hand was rather serious."

Silentpaw's anger had suddenly vanished and now was placed with curiosity. "What cat scent?" she asked.

"I'm not sure," Ravenwing butted in. "But it definitely wasn't a cat scent I smelled before."

"Was it rouges?" I prompted.

"Seems like it," Mallowtail confirmed. "This place isn't heavily patrolled so its easier for them to slip in." He then waved his tail and got up. "But you three don't have to worry about that. I think it's best if we head home. You guys did splendid when capturing the rabbit. The coordination was good."

"I thought you weren't there," I muttered.

"I saw part of it at least," he said and then flicked his tail. "Now, let's head home. You guys have done enough for today."

"But the assessment—" Blackpaw protested.

"No," Mallowtail mewed firmly. "It's too dangerous for that. And besides we don't need Silentpaw and Leafpaw injuring themselves even more."

Mallowtail then turned around and ordered us to go. Blackpaw hurried over to the bush where the rabbit was hidden and dragged it out. Silentpaw limped behind Ravewing, exhaustion clearing written all over her body. Dawnsky nudged me and I put all my effort to get up to my paws and follow Mallotail.

* * *

By the time we reached the camp, Blackpaw, Silentpaw, and I were all given the treatment we needed. After that, I slipped into my den and fell into a deep sleep. I probably slept for a long time because when I woke up the sun was gone and left a yellow-orangish glow casting over the sky.

I lifted my head up and yawned. Lifting my shoulders, I flexed it. I winced slightly as it stung but I didn't mind much of it. I got up and began grooming my fur when I suddenly noticed the den was *completely* empty. Blackpaw, Silentpaw, and even Hawk were all gone. Fear spiked through my pelt.

Where did Hawk go? And Silentpaw and Blackpaw? Why am I the only one left in here? I panicked for a heartbeat thinking something happened but I calmed myself down. I sat up and poked my head out of the den to examine the camp.

And there I captured Blackpaw sitting near the fresh-kill nosing through it. Hawk was munching on prey while Silentpaw sat near her and kept watch. I narrowed my eyes at the two.

Something was up, I knew for sure. I padded out of my den and made my way over to the fresh-kill pile and plucked out a starling. The prey was plump so I decided that I should give it to Leapflight. Gripping the starling firmly in my jaw, I walked over to the nursery and ducked under the ivy was wrung around.

"Leapflight?" I called out. The only source of light was a small crack on the side of the den. In the dimness, I could make out Leapflight's figure.

"Hm? Who's there?"

"Leafpaw. I brought you some prey—if you want," I say and dropped the starling down. Leapflight slowly got up from where she was and walked over to me. I could see that her belly had a small bump but wasn't big. She leaned forward and sniffed the starling.

"Oh you didn't have to," she mewed. "But I'm grateful, thank you."

"You're welcome." I dipped my head. "Was the bedding changed?"

Leapflight nodded. "Yes, Silentpaw changed them." She then sighed. "Gosh, I didn't know that I'll have the entire clan fussing over me like piece of prey."

I stifled a laugh. "It's been awhile since kits were born. I'm sure they'll be loved dearly by the clan."

Leapflight let out a pleased purr. "Yes, I'd like my kits to be born with love and happiness. Other than the fact the dangers surrounding this place."

I left Leapflight alone to eat and went back to the pile to grab my own prey. I sat down and ate slowly, making sure to take my time. Each moment, the camp got darker and darker and cats began slipping into their dens. Even with the camp slowly becoming quiet, I knew that I still had to be wary. The camp was more closely guarded and sometimes night patrols would be sent but not *all* the

time.

I got up from my place and slunk toward the same hole that I previously used to sneak out the camp. The sky had now turned into a dark blue with a few gray clouds hanging in the sky. The moon was slowly making it's appearance.

The hole looked way smaller from what I last remember. As I gave it a sniff, I wondered if I would really be able to squeeze through. Getting stuck would will be most likely, but I wasn't sure if getting out would be guaranteed.

I gripped the edges of the hole and began to pry it apart and get more space in. Once I was *sure* there was enough space for me to go through, I pressed myself forward and wriggled through. A grunt escapes my lips as my hind leg scrambled furiously against the ground. I heave myself forward and with a huge effort, my body shot forward and collapsed to the ground. I gasped as I lay on the ground trying to collect my breath

I'm never using that small space again. I sat up and decided to cover up the scent by grabbing the musky leaves and grass around me. Once I was done, I began to head toward the Shadowclan border where I was suppose to meet with Thornpaw. The moon was bright today and I was glad it was because the forrest was dark. Very dark.

I was glad that Thornpaw was considerate of choosing the days where the moon would be out.

It took awhile to get to the border because I was injured and didn't want to risk anymore injuries by running; I set out in a simple trot.

As I got to the border, the musky smell of the clan scents clashed over. I wrinkled my nose as I padded closer. I could barely see anything from the darkness. And I didn't want to risk going into the border and crashing into a patrol. I tensed when I heard a rustling noise.

"Leafpaw?" A sudden voice called out from the shadows. An all too familiar voice. My shoulders relaxed.

"Yep, I'm here," I mewed. The brambles rattled as Thornpaw's face appeared from the darkness. His face lit up as he saw me.

"Good, you came. I thought you weren't coming."

"I was taking my time," I mutter. "Anyways, I hope this isn't going to be boring. I will leave if it is."

Thornpaw shook his head. "No worries, it won't be boring. I found a cool place we could check out."

"In what territory?" I narrowed my eyes at him.

"It's a neutral land, kinda like a bridge between Shadowclan. You know I wouldn't go into your territory without permission." Thornpaw rolled his eyes as if I said something dumb.

"I'm just being cautious."

"Good thing you are. Now let's go." He turned around and began to trot. I followed him closely behind. We walked for quite awhile until Thornpaw stopped. He lifted his head and flicked his tongue out.

"Nearly there," he murmured. "Come on."

I leaped after him. "So, where are we exactly heading?"

"I found this—um, what's it called...." I heard him sigh. "It looks like a cave but isn't technically one. It looks like an abandoned twoleg thing. I think it's where medicine cats get their catmints from."

"Hm, that's cool but why are we going there?"

Thornpaw turned his head and looked at me "Don't you want to do something *fun*?"

"Of course I do."

He let out a purr. "Okay good. Now stop asking questions prickly rose, and follow me."

I bristled at his words and glared at Thornpaw. *Prickly rose? What in the name of starclan?*

"What's with that stupid nickname?" I complained. He padded through some ivies and jumped over onto a fallen branch and turned to me with a playful gleam in his eyes.

"Why not? It fits your personality. Can barely see a difference."

I scowled. "My *personality*? Are you insulting me, you shadowclan fox-heart?" I spat, glaring at him, My fur was fluffed out and my tail was lashing but I then relaxed knowing that Thornpaw was only teasing.

I heard him chuckle. "You see? Prickly. P-r-i-c—"

"Shut up!"

We beat around the bush trying to find out where the place is when the bushes and brambles cleared into an old pathway that led up to an overgrown twoleg cave. There were ivies and vines growing on the side of the cave and in front of it was a patch of green catmints. They were small and weren't fully bloomed yet but I could see that they were taken good care of.

"So are we here for catmint picking?" I ask looking around.

"No. Something better." Thornpaw faced the twoleg cave. "Let's see who can get on top of the twoleg cave."

I frowned. "What? Isn't that dangerous?"

Unease crept through me. I was still injured and climbing over twoleg things? That was like asking trouble to come over and make themselves home.

"You heard me unless you aren't willing for a competition?" Thornpaw sneered and gave his tail a flick. "That's okay, I knew Skyclan exceptional talent of climbing was just a rumor anyways."

"Oh please you know that's not true. Fine, we'll race to the top and see who's better."

"That's more like it."

The two of us were about to head toward the twoleg cave when I heard a loud rustle making me freeze in place. My nose twitched.

"Hey, did you hear that?" I question, looking around. Thornpaw tensed beside me.

"No. Is something wrong?"

"Yeah. I heard something," I say, feeling uneasy. As if one cue, I heard another rustling and a few murmurs. Thornpaw padded closer to me. His ears were pricked and angling around.

"I heard that," he murmured. "It sounded like someone was talking." I nodded in agreement.

"Let's follow the noise," I tell him. Thornpaw rounded on me in shock.

"What? Leafpaw, that's not a good idea. It could be rouges or something worse. Gee you're more of a mouse-brain than I thought."

"Listen, earless fur-brain, *listen*. I never said to go attack whoever is there. Let's see who it is and if it is rouges then we can head back and report it to the clan."

"You suggest they'll fancy an apprentice hanging around the forrest in the middle of the night?"

"Well lie! Be creative. C'mon."

When Thornpaw didn't look convinced, I sighed. "I promise I won't throw us into danger."

"Yeah that's the thing I'm worried about. Let's go then."

I turned around and padded toward the noise, making sure to keep my paw steps light. I tried to catch the scent but the other scents around hid the scent from being revealed. However, the murmurs were getting more visible and louder. After walking for a bit, I paused and instantly crouched down.

I could hear voice and that means that we are close. The voices then stopped and I let out a hiss of frustration. "I know it was here.." I mutter to myself.

"Something wrong?" Thornpaw hissed from behind.

"The voices stopped," I whispered and angle my ears, straining to hear the voices once more. Thornpaw squeezed in beside me and pricked his ears.

The bushes around us made a good cover so I knew we wouldn't get caught and the wind was blowing toward us so our scent wouldn't be caught either. At least for now. I could hear shuffling when a too familiar voice spoke out that made me freeze in place.

"Don't worry Silentpaw, this is a safe place."

What?! There is no way....What is Silentpaw doing here? And that voice....Hawk? Why are they out of the camp? My eyes widened. I was unable to control the shock that had me frozen in place. *I must've heard that wrong. There's just no way—*

"Silentpaw? What is she doing here? Leafpaw?" Thornpaw murmured behind me. I could feel him tense as he wriggled beside me.

"I'm not sure—" I was cut off when I heard my sisters and Hawk's voice talking.

"I'm not so sure, Hawk. I feel like we are being watched."

"We're good. But I still cannot thank you for getting me out of the camp," Hawk said.

I flexed my claws, restless. "This is madness," I snarled softly. "Silentpaw helped Hawk out? What—you know what I'm going there."

"Leafpaw, no! Stop!" Thornpaw tried to grab me but I barged out of the bushes and halted right in front of the two she-cats who turned to look at me with widened eyes and jaws agape.

Silentpaw's stared at me "Leafpaw? What—" Her eyes widened even more as her eyes fell behind me and saw Thornpaw walk behind and stand next to me.

Hawk let out a snarl and instantly went by Silentpaw's side. My eyes were locked upon Silentpaw as we stared at each other we shock.

The secrets were unmasked now. And there's no turning back.

23 | stained

4/16
earlier that day...

S I L E N T

"I'm starting to get used to seeing you in my den every day." Laughed Ivypaw as she softly pressed a wad of cobwebs over the nasty scratch one of the racoons had given me on my flank.

"I'm going to smell like herbs for a moon!" I groaned while letting my head fall into my paws, Ivypaw rolled her eyes before turning her attention to the smaller wounds on my tail. "Maybe that's not suck a bad thing." Ivypaw mewed softly and I grunted a reply.

I hissed under my breath as Ivypaw pressed down on the wound trying to stop the bleeding. *If Blackpaw hadn't thrown himself at the racoons maybe, we could have ran and not been hurt.* I thought and narrowed my eyes.

The black tom had become more aggressive over the past few sunrises, and I had no idea why. I had shared this with Hawk and she told me how Blackpaw had no longer looked at her with hostility but more respect.

Could Blackpaw be siding with the rouges? No! Of course not, Blackpaw may be aggressive but he's a loyal Skyclan cat. *I hope.*

"Ok! The wounds are all good now but come to me tomorrow for a new dressing." Ivypaw mewed with a playful flick of her tail over my folded ear.

I nodded and smiled at the medicine cat apprentice before turning tail and trotting out of the medicine cat den. I looked around the clearing and noticed Leafpaw heading up the rockslide path to the apprentices den.

I was about to follow when a felt something brush my tail and turned to see Hawk, "Hawk, you can't do away from the apprentices den!" I whisper hissed at the calico.

"It's fine, I've been snoozing around the camp all day!" Hawk mewed while stretching. The calico had been here for over a moon now and I sometimes wondered if she ever wanted to leave.

"You're lucky Finchstar isn't making you do apprentice duties around the camp. Oh Starclan your lucky the warriors don't put up a fuss about having to feed you even when you have given them nothing in exchange!" I huffed and started making my way towards the fresh kill pile.

Hawk trotted at my side and watched as I took a squirrel from the fresh kill.

I started to make my way over to the elders den when Hawk stopped me, "Where are you going with that squirrel?" The calico asked.

I tilted my head at her, "To the elders den? Queens, kits, and elders always get fed before warriors." I explained and Trotted around Hawk to get in the elders den entrance.

Flakenose was sharing tongues with Foxwhisker while Flowerheart dozed peacefully besides them, but the moment I entered the den the elderly she-cat picked up her head at the scent of prey.

"Silentpaw! Come in dear." Foxwhisker mewed happily. I stalked over to the 3 elders before laying down the squirrel in front of them.

"Fresh out the fresh kill." I mewed and Foxwhisker gave me a nod of thanks but I noticed Flakenose sending a glare towards the outside of their den.

I turned and saw Hawk sitting outside the elders den with her tail wrapped neatly over her paws.

Flakenose hissed while flattening her ears, "I've never liked the idea of rouges let alone one living in our camp!"

Foxwhisker followed Flakenose gaze and sneered, "That cat is a waste of our prey." He mewed and I looked towards Flowerheart to see her staring at Hawk with more curiosity than hostility.

"Silentpaw!" I heard a voice yowl and I gave the elders a nod of good bye before sprinting out of the elders den.

I saw Mallowtail walking down the rockslide path and I figured he wanted me to do more camp duties.

I sighed and was about to meet him at the rockslide path when Hawk stopped me yet again.

"Silentpaw can we talk when you have time?" Hawk asked me and I saw nervousness in her green gaze. "Of course." I mewed quickly before trotting over to meet Mallowtail.

I wonder what is so important. I wondered as I skipped my way over to Mallowtail.

* * *

The feeling of wet moss in my jaws was refreshing as I worked my way from The Silver Pelt River back to camp.

Mallowtail had ordered me to do some basic apprentice tasks since I was the least injured in the racoon attack. My paws were sore and my tail ached by it wasn't anything serious.

The thorn tunnel came into view and I slowly slipped through, the wet moss dragging under my paws. The bright sun warmed my pelt as I stepped into camp. Embernose was eating a magpie with Petalshade besides the elders den while Mouseclaw, Leapflight, and Mallowtail were talking privately at the end of the Rockslide path.

Finchstar was trotting out of her den towards them and Ivypaw was sorting some herbs outside of the medicine cat den.

Foxwhisker had shared a quick word with Embernose and Petalshade before moving back into the elders den. Flakenose was passing by the fresh kill to make her way to Ivypaw, "Hello young apprentice." Flakenose mewed softly sitting down besides Ivypaw.

"Hello Flakenose!" Ivypaw mewed while keeping her eyes on the herbs in front of her. The two cats continued to talk and then did I remember that the two were kin, Flakenose being Petalshade's mother.

I turned my attention towards the elders den and trotted over while the water dripped under my paws and left a slight damp trail. Embernose looked up from his magpie wing and huffed as I passed by.

I didn't give the tom my time because he was just like his son Blackpaw. Any cat would be surprised that Swiftleap, one of the nicest and strongest toms in Skyclan, was kin of Embernose and Blackpaw, two of the most sarcastic and mean toms in the clan.

I trotted my way into the elders den and saw Flowerheart laid down in her nest with her back legs stretched out while her breath came out ragged gasps. The old she-cat was growing older and almost every day was something wrong with her.

Aching bones, dry throat, poor eyesight, and a nasty lung infection that didn't look like it was getting any better. The white she-cats head raised as I entered and her black tail flicked impatiently, "Its about time! You apprentices are so slow!-" Flowerheart yowled but was cough off by a nasty spasm of coughing.

Foxwhisker was sat down across the den from Flowerheart and gave the old she-cat eyes of sympathy. "Old friend, Silentpaw is doing her best. I'm proud that she is walking properly with that nasty shoulder wound and that slash on his tail. Racoons are dangerous little thorns." Foxwhisker mewed while standing up and placing a paw on Flowerhearts shoulder.

Flowerhearts coughing fit stopped and she turned to Foxwhisker with a stern glare. "I've battled racoons before and after I had to battle those Shadowclan rats! I'm sure an apprentice such as your kin, Foxwhisker, can handle a few dancing rats!" Flowerheart snarled and moved away from Foxwhiskers paw.

My eyes narrowed but I still trotted over to Flowerheart and placed the wet moss at her paws. "If you need more Flowerheart please ask

me." I mewed quietly and Flowerheart gave me a nod before her eyes narrowed.

"Actually sprout, can you remove this tick from my tail? It's been biting me all morning!" Flowerheart complained while sitting up and wrapping her tail over her paws.

"Of course! I'll get some mouse bile from Parsleyseed." I mewed and quickly ran outside of the elders den towards the medicine cat den across the camp.

I stopped in front of the medicine den and Gave Ivypaw and Flakenose a nod of greeting before walking in. The fresh smell of herbs entered my nose as I noticed Parsleyseed sitting at the back of his den, the white tom was staring blankly at the small leaking water in the den and I suddenly remembered the strange daydream at had while almost falling off a tree.

My body shook nervously as I remembered the burning sensation of the fire burning off my pelt and skin.

I shook my head before announcing my presence, "Parsleyseed?" I mewed and the white toms head shot up and he turned to me with a slight snarl. "What is it?!?" He snapped and I hid back my own growl.

"Flowerheart needs mouse bile. May I please have some?" I mewed softly and watched as Parsleyseed stomped over to his herb store and search through the stone shelves to find a small moss ball and watched as he dipped it into some yellowish green liquid.

The grumpy tom when stomped over to me and dropped the mouse bile soaked moss at my paws, "You know what to do and make sure to wash your paws in the RiverPelt river afterwards." The tom hissed before turning away.

I slashed my tail and turned back to the entrance before slipping out. The stench of the mouse bile almost made me gag and I could feel the eyes of someone on the back of my neck and I turned to see Hawk staring down at me from the apprentice den entrance. The she-cats gaze was full of desperation and anxiety.

She wanted to talk, it must be something important. I thought and quickly made my way back to the elders den.

I entered and saw Floweheart still in her nest talking quietly with Flakenose while Foxwhisker laid asleep in his nest. Flowerheart turned to me and then folded her tail on her side.

I sat down at the she-cats side and examined her tail for the tick and she continued to talk with Flakenose. "Do you really believe that that traitor is still alive?" Flakenose asked and Flowerheart nodded.

"The cat might have been banished but he is still alive. He was a strong warrior and I'm sure he will want revenge on Skyclan for casting him out all those moons ago." Flowerheart mewed and my ears perked.

Flakenose took notice of my curiosity and let out a mrrow of laughter, "Those mentors of yours don't teach the rights of our clans history." Flakenose stated and she was about to continue when a toms voice came from the den entrance, "Are you two filling my apprentices head with the stories of elder tales?" Mallowtail asked and eyed them.

Flakenoses eyes narrowed and she shook her head before moving back towards her nest. Flowerheart nodded at me while Mallowtail walked and sat at my side.

Finally after a few more moments I found the tick and softly patted the moss filled mouse bile on the nasty wench. Flowerheart hissed but relaxed after a moment.

"There, no more ticks Flowerheart." I mewed and the white she-cat gave me a nod of thanks. Mallowtail now stood at the den exit and flicked his tail for me to come with him. I nodded a good bye to the elders before following the pale ginger tom outside of the den.

Mallowtail was about to walk over to Dawnsky before turning to me, "Don't believe some of the elders tales, most of them are older then most StarClan cats. Also your den mates will miss training tomorrow and the next day, as will you. I suggest using this period

to relax for your wounds." Mallowtail mewed and trotted over to Dawnsky.

Disappointment washed over me but I didn't let it dwell as I knew Hawk needed me.

I trotted over to the Rockslide path and starting moving my way up when I saw Hawk outside of the apprentice den. The she-cats eyes lit up as she saw me and patted the space next to her with her paw.

I climbed up the last of the rocks and finally sat down besides Hawk, "So, what's so important?" I asked the calico and she turned away from me reluctantly. "I don't want you to get in trouble with your clan mates.." Hawk whispered so the apprentices in the apprentice den couldn't hear us.

I tilted my head at the she-cat and she refused to meet my gaze, "You can tell me, I'm your friend!" I mewed and playfully nudged her with my paw. Hawk gave me a smile and then looked down at her paws.

"I—" Hawk closed her eyes and reluctantly continued. "I need to get back to the rouges. I'm worried about my brother, and now that I've learned that the clans are just kind cats who want to protect their clanmates and kin, maybe I can help change his mind about the clans. I don't want any more innocent cats to get hurt." Hawk explained and rested her head in her paws, "Especially you."

I stared down at the calico with narrowed eyes for a moment before my eyes softened again, "I always knew you would eventually ask me this, and, I'll help you." I mewed softly and rubbed my muzzle against Hawks.

"You'll—You'll really help?" Hawk eyes grew wide and she looked as if she wanted to jump on me out of excitement but stopped herself to avoid the eyes of suspicion from my clanmates.

"Of course I'll help! But we will have to use the shadows of the night to help us escape." I whispered and moved closer to hawk to make up a plan of escape.

* * *

I sat down calmly a few fox lengths away from the fresh kill and wrapped my tail over my paws. I watched Hawk eat as to make my clanmates believe I was making sure she wasn't doing anything bad.

Blackpaw was pulling a tiny cardinal from the fresh kill pile when the scent of Leafpaw touched my nose and I turned my head to see my sister padding down from the fresh kill and pulling out a starling before she turned and made her way over to the nursery where leapflight was resting.

I closed my eyes and sighed softly, *I wish I could share all of this with Leafpaw. But I have no idea how she will react.*. I thought before turning to the fresh kill and plucking out a thrush and after walking a few fox lengths away from Hawk so my clanmates would not get suspicious.

I tore off a wing from the starlings body and ate it slowly while I watched the camp closely. Finchstar and Mallowtail was sitting outside of Finchstars den while Parsleyseed and Ivypaw were making their way up to them.

Stoneheart stood at the thorn tunnel waiting for the night patrol which included Swiftleap, Ravenwing, Embernose, and Mouseclaw. Cloudfur and Snowpebble were sharing a few baby voles while Petalshade and Honeywisp were sharing tongues with the elders outside of the elders den.

Just as Leafpaw had exited the nursery and went to collect her own prey Dawnsky trotted into the nursery to speak with Leapflight.

Hawk had finished her meal and I flicked my tail in order to tell her to go to the apprentice den. Blackpaw had already went to his nest so I had to wait for leafpaw to go to sleep before me and hawk could go for our escape.

But watching my sister eat as slowly as she was I figured that maybe she was looking to join the night patrol. I decided that maybe waiting in the apprentice den for everyone to go to sleep would be better then waiting here staring blankly.

I sat up and patted over to the Rockslide path and made my way towards the apprentice den. I patted through to see Blackpaw fast asleep in his nest in the far back of the den while Hawk was sleeping in a nest in the middle of the den, as I stepped in she opened one eye and looked up at me before smiling and fake sleeping once again.

I was glad I had moved my own nest closer to the den entrance so I laid down as I watched the sun set.

Soon enough the camp was quiet and the distant howl of wolves were heard just enough to be heard behind the sound of the Silver pelt river. I perked my ears and I could hear the slight breathing of Blackpaw but also a fear scent radiating from Hawk.

I flicked my tail slightly and lowly turned my gaze towards Hawk and nodded towards the exit of the den.

The calico looked at me with eyes full of nervousness before she quietly started to stand up as well. I poked my head out from the den and looked around the camp for a guard but found no cat speaking a sound besides the slight loud of cats breathing.

My claws unsheathed as the nervousness caught up to me and I realized what could happen if my clan mates were to find out that I was the reason our prisoner escapes. I stopped at the exit and turned to look at Hawk, she was staring at me with eyes of anxiety.

She's my friend, but this is my clan, if they found out I left her leave would have exile me? Would Finchstar cast me out? Would Mouseclaw still see me as his kin? What would Leafpaw say? Does star clan even approve of these newly found feelings?

I gave Hawk one last look before I turned with a flick of my tail and started to creep my way down the Rockslide path towards the small hole in the thorn wall that me and Leafpaw used to leave the camp in our kit hood against Mouseclaw and Willownose.

I got to the small hole and realized how big I have gotten since the last time we used it. I flicked my tail at Hawk and started to squeeze through the small hole.

The feeling of being surrounded at all angles and having sharp thorns press against my flank felt suffocating. Panic rushed over me and I pelted through the small hole and almost ran into a tree right on the other side of it.

My breath came out ragged and my felt the sight blood drip the thorns gave me on my flank and legs. Hawk rushed after me and came to my side, "What's wrong? We don't have to do this you know. You don't have to let me escape, I'd truly understand!" Hawk whispered but I shook away my fears.

"No, being surrounded like that just make my pelt itch." I mewed and looked towards the moon that was almost to the highest point.

"Do you want to do something together before I must leave?" Hawk asked and rubbed her cheek against mine with a affectionate purr. I matched the gestor before looking at Hawk, "Like what?" I mewed and Hawk pointed towards the forest with her muzzle and started to lead the way.

Hawk was leading me towards the edge of the Skyclan border and I didn't realize how scary the forest looked in the dead of night. Distant cries of owl and wolves were heard and that didn't help my already anxiety filled heart.

Hawk could sense my worry and patted at my side, "Don't worry Silentpaw, this is a safe place." Hawk mewed and muzzled me when I felt the sense of being watched.

"I'm not so sure, Hawk. I feel like we are being watched." I confessed.

"We're good. But I cannot thank you for getting me out of camp," Hawk mewed but the feelings of anxiety grew stronger when the bushes ahead of us started to rustle and too cats jumped out from them.

I stared at the cats for a second before I recognized the she-cat in the front of the two, "Leafpaw? What—" I was about to say when I spotted the cat behind her to be a ShadowClan apprentice I had seen before at gatherings.

Hawk snarled and stood protectively at my side while me and Leafpaw stood, eyes locked.

Me and Leafpaws eyes locked in a cold contest. Both of us wanted to ask what we were doing out here and with our forbidden companions but neither of us wanted to sneak up first.

From the way the Shadowclan apprentice stared back at me and Hawk, also the way he shielded Leafpaws side I could tell the two of them were good friends. I couldn't remember his name but I remembered his face in the cluster of Shadowclan apprentices at gatherings.

Hawks ears went flat against her head as her tail lashed from side to side while her and the ShadowClan apprentice stared each other down though the dark tom was more wary if anything.

After what felt like a moon Leafpaws eyes narrowed and she spoke in a furious voice. "Silentpaw, why is the rouge out of camp? And why are you with her?!" Leafpaw snapped which caused my eyes to light with rage.

"Your asking me what I'm doing? Why don't I ask you what your doing with that Shadowclan foxheart?!?" I hissed and I felt Hawks awkward gaze on me.

The ShadowcClan apprentice unsheathed his claws and lash his tail while glaring at me but my eyes did flutter away from Leafpaws cold gaze.

"Maybe you should stop being so judgmental of the other clans! Not all cats from the other clans are like those stupid nursery tales or the elders tales! Some of them are like us, they just want to protect their clanmates and kin! Maybe the reason the clans are so problematic because their all too Mouse brained to work together to try and not cause conflicts!" Leafpaw hissed out while fluffing out her tail and neck fur.

My anger raised to the stars and all my deeper thoughts and opinions seemed to spill out all at once, "Maybe the reasons the clans can never get along is because they all believe their all better

than any other cat! The clans believe their all so great and mighty but what they really are is clans full of tyrants and foxhearts!" I yowled and finally removed my gaze from Leafpaws and my eyes softened as they met Hawks.

"Go home, your kin need you." I mewed softly and heard a furious hiss from Leafpaw but I ignored her.

Hawk gave me a look to make sure she was hearing me right and I nodded once more before flicking my tail towards the Mountain range wall that led towards the area where Hawk used to come from when she could sneak around Skyclan territory.

"Silentpaw if you let that rouge go the clans won't be able to get information out of her! We won't be able to find a way to defeat the rouges without her!" Leafpaw growled and tried to jump in Hawks away but I stood in front of Hawk and stood eye to eye with Leafpaw. With me being taller I had to slightly look down at my sister, but that didn't stop her from standing as tall as she usual does.

Leafpaw looked shocked that I blocked her path but her eyes quickly turned back to hostility. "Leafpaw, Hawk is my friend. She's not like the other rouges! She promised me that she would do her best to try to convince the other rouges to leave the clans alone." I explained but Leafpaw didn't want to hear any of it,

"How can you trust that flee!?! Silentpaw, we can't trust her and how do we know she won't just walk into the rouges and tell them everything she knows about the clans and everything you have probably telling her!" Leafpaw spat and her eyes fell to Hawk who was slowly backing away.

I didn't respond to Leafpaws statement and turned to Hawk, "Leave." I mewed and the calico gave me one last soft smile before she ran into the darkness.

I turned back to Leafpaw and the Shadowclan apprentice to see them talking quietly. Leafpaw flicked her tail at him and the matted furred tom gave me one last look before he also ran into the darkness towards the ShadowClan border.

Leafpaw had her back turned to me but when the Shadowclan apprentice had gone, my sister turned her icy glare towards me and I felt my heart sting.

This will forever leave a stain in between us, and I'm not sure if we can ever get this stain out no matter how many times we clean our pelts.

***

HI OMFG I HAVE BEEN WORKING ON THIS GOD DAMN CHAPTER FOR TOO LONG AND I AM SO SORRY IT TOOK ME SO LONG! I've had the problems with Family and friends over the past week and it ragingly killed all my writing motivation and I'm sorry for that ;-;

I hope you are all well and THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR 1.27K READS, ITS GREATLY APPRECIATED!!

- Caption

24 | skirmish

4/17

C H E R R Y

I padded through the forest with a fat thrush and two blackbirds hinged in my jaw. The breeze was an extremely chilly as it blew though my fur leaving me shuddering slightly. In front of me was Creekpool, a dappled tabby she-cat along with Palestripe, a light brown molly.

The three of us were in a hunting patrol but even so I could feel the ringing tension surrounding the patrol.

We padded through the forrest in silence though there was an occasional cry of birds. Our hunting session was done so we were heading back to the camp. We walked for a while until the camp's entrance came into view. Feeling relieved that I didn't have to walk through the silence anymore, I hurried my pace and squeezed through the thorny entrance.

As I entered the camp, I tried to ignore the enraging tension that was pooling around the camp. I padded over to the fresh-kill pile that sat near a tree stump near the nursery. I dropped the prey into the pile.

"Oh, is that a thrush?" A raspy voice mewed startling me. I whipped my head in the direction and saw Lizardstripe staring at the thrush.

"Yep. I just caught it," I mewed.

"My, it's been a while since I and the others had one," the old brown tom rasped wistfully. He then sighed. "It's actually been a long time since I stepped out of the camp. With the rouges and all..."

"And Ashstar," I muttered which earned a sharp look from Lizardstripe. However he didn't say anything about my comment.

Instead, he snatched the thrush up and walked over to the elders den.

And even if he did say anything about my comment, I wouldn't take it back, I thought bitterly and I was sure most of the cats around here felt the same towards Ashstar.

Ever since the rouges attacked the patrol Ashstar was on, he started acting more paranoid. He would lock himself into his den and snap at anyone—even Flashleap—that would come into his den. Then recently, he got into a border dispute with Skyclan. From what Littlefoot and Sandstep told us, Ashstar was the one who actually started the conflict and that he blamed Skyclan of crossing the border when our own clan had overstepped the borders.

Now we had to worry about the rouges and Skyclan. In fact, we probably lost a valuable ally. Then recently one of our apprentices, Rowanpaw, had fallen ill. Since the Mountain Ranges bring harsher weather, leaf-bare was still in effect and harsh winds calloused our sore-ridden bodies.

Hazelberry and Mistcreek were struggling to restock their herbs as it is. Right now, they didn't have the required herbs needed to make Rowanpaw better. The herbs that the medicine cats needed were deeper into the territory however Ashstar refused to let any patrols into the area.

Sandstep padded from where she was basking in the sunlight near the nursery. Her belly was round with kits and with Flashleap being the father.

"Finally, some fresh prey," she mewed, digging through the pile. "I'm hungry as a wolf!"

I let out an amused purr though I couldn't help but wonder why a she-cat would want to be pregnant and stay in the nursery all the time when they could be hunting and patrolling. Yes, that was their choice, but was I really the one who thought that having kits isn't the only happiness in a relationship?

Shaking out my thoughts, I quickly grabbed two water shrews and

headed toward the medicine cat den, knowing that the two had probably not eaten anything for a while since their main focus was Rowanpaw. I ducked under the mouth of the cave and peered into the den.

"Mistcreek, grab some coltsfoot," I heard Hazelberry order following a patter of footsteps. I walked into the den and saw Mistcreek hurrying over to where the herbs were stored but then stopped short when he saw me.

"Cherryflare?" he mewed, surprise in his voice. I drop the prey down and rub my cheek against his.

"You sound you've never seen your sister," I purred and drew back. Mistcreek let out a small *mrrow* of laughter and shook his head.

"No, I'm just surprised you visited at all," he muttered.

I rolled my eyes. "Seriously? You're the one who locked yourself into your own den!"

Mistcreek was about to say something when a fit of cough stopped him. He then quickly turned around and shuffled through the stock of herbs and scooped up a bunch leaves which I assumed were coltsfoot and then hurried to the back of the den. I slowly followed.

Inside, Hazelberry was towering over a nest where a small white tom with ginger patches lay. She looked up when she saw Mistcreek padding over with the coltsfoot.

"Thank you," she said curtly and snatched the leaves up. She bent down and began chewing them into a pulp then shook Rowanpaw slightly. "Here have some of this," she urged.

Rowanpaw lifted his head weakly and stared at the herbs before licking them up. The simple task seemed to have taken half of the tom's energy. His body slumped back into his nest. "I'm not gonna get any better am I?" Rowanpaw rasped weakly.

"Who put such thistledown thoughts on your head?" Hazelberry demanded. She nudged the tom back into a sleeping posture and pressed her muzzle on top of his head. "You *will* get better. I'll make

sure of it."

Even though Hazelberry said it, I could hear the uneasy waver in her voice. She turned around and ushered us out of den.

As soon as we were out, I faced Hazelberry. "Is he really gonna be alright?"

The dark brown she-cat hesitated. "I'm not sure. His coughing is getting worse and without the herbs that I need, I don't know if he'll make it far. His body has always been weak when fighting off from infection."

I shook my head. I would often hear the strong spasm coughs that would rack the white and ginger tom's body and would always see him lurking near the medicine den. Everyone in the clan knew that Rowanpaw was always sick. Many believed he wouldn't be able to be a warriors with such a sickness and would often pity the tom. And to make matters worse, he was born during the harsh winter that made his lungs weaker.

Mistcreek shuffled his foot. "He's always been sick actually. Ever since he was born, Rowanpaw had a weak internal system. He would have breathing issues and cough of often," he admited. "At first, we thought that Rowanpaw wouldn't be able to be a warrior, but Hazelberry had a patient before who also had weak breathing patterns due to the exposure of Twoleg things. She would often have the patient do exercise to keep his lungs working and clean. So she assigned Rowanpaw to do these exercise that are meant to help him but I—I guess it didn't help much."

"If only Ashstar would let us get the herbs!" I snarled and unsheathed my claws in rage. "But no, he's too busy moping in the corner of his den like a scared rabbit instead of taking his responsibilities like a true leader!"

Hazelberry looked stressed and paced around the den. "I would have a patrol go get the herbs but it would only anger Ashstar and bring more problems into this clan, and going alone into an unregulated territory is dangerous."

I stifled a snort. "Wolftalon was ready to bolt through the entrance if it weren't for Ashstar."

Mistcreek flicked his tail in response. "Well he is technically Ashstar's number one hater."

"Okay, enough you two. We cannot discuss such matters openly. Mistcreek, I need you to find more coltfoot, tansy, and juniper berries. Even tho newleaf is near, the cold has yet to plunge, so I doubt they might've sprouted but we must keep looking." Hazelberry then turned to me. "Cherryflare, why don't you find a patrol and make yourself useful instead of burrowing yourself here?

"Okay. Good luck," I called before heading out of the den and slipping outside. My eyes caught on a small group that was sitting around Flashleap. I padded over to the group and sat besides Toadstrike.

"What's going on?" I whispered to him.

"Border patrols," he hissed back.

"Oh. Any sign of Ashstar?" I asked and turned my head toward Ashstar's den. There was barely a flicker or a movement of shadow to show a sign of life. I turned my head back and focused my attention to Flashleap. Toadstrike shook his head and shuffled his paws.

"Nope. No sign of him."

I scoffed. "Why does it even matter? He doesn't ever take the responsibility of a clan leader. Instead he goes around barking and stirring up trouble like a mouse-brained apprentice!"

Toadstrike muttered in agreement.

"Sunnyshine," Flashleap mewed. "I want you to be in a patrol with Brookwater and Breezepaw. I want you three to head along the Windclan border. Now for the SkyClan border I want Scorchsun, Cherryflare, and Creekpool to go."

Toadstrike eyes widened. "Ooooh, you got Dustflame in your

patrol."

I fluffed out my fur at the sound of his name. "What about him?"

Toadstrike rolled his eyes. "Are you for real? Everyone knows that he's head over heels for you."

"Okay so? Doesn't mean I have to like him."

The gray tom narrowed his eyes. "But you do don't you? You don't have to lie I already know."

"I don't," I snapped but I knew what Toadstrike said was true. I did somewhat like Scorchsun. And even though he was grumpy most of the time, he was a nice and genuine cat which was weird because he was grumpy with everyone but anytime he hung out with me, he seemed more cheerful—or he just wanted kits. Who knows.

"If you like him, why don't you tell him? He wouldn't say no and you'd have a mate so why do you deny it and continue lying?" Toadstrike asked, making me shift in my spot awkwardly.

Because maybe Scorchsun wouldn't accept me for who I am. Maybe he wants to have kits and I don't; I just want a loving, healthy relationship without having the need to bear kits like every other she-cat. And its not a short term affect—I don't want kits at all.

Unlike everyone else, I'm different. Rather than focusing on building a family, I want to focus on hunting and patrolling. I tipped my head towards where Flashleap sat, his tail wrapped neatly around his paws as he shouted orders. *I want to aim higher than just being a good warrior, I want to be a deputy and then hopefully a leader. It's a kit's dream, but I've never wanted anything more. However, if that were the case, I couldn't have kits because they would postpone me if the opportunity ever came up—I'd be so preoccupied with one thing that I'll lose sight of my only ever dream.*

My gaze flickered over to where the dark tom sat and felt a throb of loneliness tug my heart.

He's likely the same as any other tom. He probably wants a family because like every tom, he wouldn't have to take time off his duties for

almost around seven to eight moons. He wouldn't feel the pain of giving birth.

My throat tightened as I recalled the memory of Sunnyshine's birth and her yowls that echoed through the camp walls. It had terrified me to the bone and silently, even though I was an apprentice, I swore I wouldn't ever put myself through such pain.

And is it even selfish to put myself first before another tom? I swept my gaze around. *Many would think so, but even then it didn't mean I didn't want to spend my life with someone. I still wanted to love and care, but what if that's not enough? It's the only reason why I haven't confessed.*

"Hey you there?" Toadstrike slapped me with his tail, gaining my attention and drawing me away from my thoughts. I shrugged his tail off and glared at him.

"Sorry, but anyways, just take your chances with him."

I let out a sigh. "Have you ever felt some type of change in you that's not like everyone else and you know that if you told anyone, no one would accept you?"

Toadstrike gave me an odd look. "Uhh, yes? Not really . . . wait, what are you even talking about?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. I'm just going through a change—on myself, and if anyone knew about it, I know I probably wouldn't be accepted."

"You're not murdering someone are you?" Toadstrike joked. I slapped him on the shoulder.

"Of course not, mouse brain!"

"So then tell me what change you're going through."

I hunched my shoulder and stayed silent for a moment. I wasn't sure if I wanted to tell Toadstrike my secret but I wanted to tell him so badly because I just *needed* to tell someone. And I know that I could trust him because well we've always looked out for each other.

"Well, first of all it starts with kits. Look, *any* mates you see around here all have kits right? Well if I were to have a mate, that would mean having kits but the thing is, I don't want kits. Not now, not ever. Not even if I found the love of my life. *Never.*"

Toadstrike nodded slowly, as if he was processing what I was saying.

"Secondly, I—I don't feel comfortable with the way someone would address me."

"Address you? How?"

"Like, if you see a she-cat how would you address her? She/her, right? Well I don't feel like those pronouns . . . fit me. Like it's not me. It's just—not *me.*" I turned to look at Toadstrike, a little scared to find him staring at me like I had gone insane but instead found him looking thoughtful.

"I think I understand," he mewed. My eyes widened.

"Really?"

"Yeah! I mean it makes sense why you won't tell Dustflame. But I mean you don't feel like she/her or uh, having kits isn't you, so do whatever makes you feel like Cherryflare. I'm not gonna deny whatever you're going through because that's really not fair and I'm not so mouse brained like that. If you're going through something like that, I support and understand you because hey, not everyone is the same."

A purr rumbled in my throat as I stare at my brother happily. I lean forward and rub my cheek against his, feeling a burst of relief and gratefulness seeping through me. "Thank you," I breathed.

Toadstrike was about to respond when a sudden movement suddenly caught at the edge of my vision. I drew back and quickly avert my gaze at the movement and let out a startled mew. Toadstrike eyes widened slightly while there was a small clamor of the group beside us as everyone then took as the dreaded cat made his way over to where the group was gathered.

Ashstar.

I leaned over to Toadstrike and whispered in his ear, "Look who decided to show up." I then quickly pulled back and closed my mouth when Ashstar snapped his head toward my direction. He narrowed his eyes but then continued walking over to where his deputy sat.

"Have you sent out border patrols?" the tom rasped.

Flashleap eyes narrowed into slits. "Yes, I have."

"Then I'll assume you have the SkyClan border patrol set up?"

Flashleap nodded slowly while murmurs rose up from the group.

"Great starclan, he's at it again isn't he?" I heard Palestripe whisper to Littlefoot who stared at his leader warily.

"Who's in the patrol?" Ashstar growled softly. The tom looked deathly sick. He looked like he hadn't eaten for days and hadn't kept his fur clean and kept.

"Scorchsun, Cherryflare, and Creekpool," Flashleap mewed. He got up and slowly approached the dark gray tom. "Ashstar, you're ill. It's best if you don't go on a patrol at all let alone to Skyclan."

"Who are you to tell me what to do?" Ashstar roared and leaped to his paws, glaring at Flashleap.

"Your deputy," Flashleap hissed softly. "Someone who actually cares about Thunderclan instead letting an *apprentice* suffer, getting our patrols into tension with Skyclan. In fact, you are too ill to lead at all!"

My eyes widened in horror as a I fully registered Flashleap's words. His speech had hit everyone like a cold slap across the cheek. Silence filled the camp and everyone held their breath as their eyes flicked from Ashstar to Flashleap.

"*What did you just say?"* Ashstar snarled, his voice laced with so much venom it, it sent shivers down my spine.

Flashleap didn't say anything, not even a peep to defend whatever he said. Ashstar padded forward until he was nose to nose with his deputy. "If you think I'm so unfit to lead, why don't you go get your nine lives and become a leader? Huh?"

Flashleap stayed silent while small gasps of horror echoed through the camp. I held my breath, unsure of what would happen if Ashstar would attack his deputy because by the looks of him, I wouldn't be surprised if Ashstar did.

"Don't question me again!" Ashstar spat. He then whirled around and waved his tail. "My patrol, with me!"

I shared an uneasy glance with Toadstrike before slowly making my way over to where Ashstar was waiting.

"Be careful!" Toadstrike called, his eyes glistening with worry.

I'm not even sure if that's a choice anymore.

* * *

The patrol walked in utter silence. As if saying anything would cause an outburst from Ashstar.

But the anger was real and very much alive. No one had to say anything to understand the tension surrounding us. The anger itself that was radiating off of everyone was a communication of our own.

My thoughts were in a jumble ever since I told Toadstrike about how I felt. I trusted him and I know he wouldn't tell anyone but I still wasn't sure of myself. And it didn't help that Scorchsun was here too.

Without even thinking, I stole a glance at the dark tom and was flustered to find him staring at me. I looked away and stared at the ground in front of me until I heard his footsteps make way over to me. I held my breath as I drowned in panic and my heart beat pounded against my chest.

Just take your chances with him. Toadstrike's words earlier washed

over me and I found myself deciding to take it.

"Hi," Scorchsun whispered.

Without looking at him I whispered, "Hi."

"That was crazy back there," he muttered. "Who knew Ashstar was a walking bagder."

I stifled a snort of laughter but forced it down. "What? Ashstar, a badger?"

"Yeah, I mean badgers are pretty grumpy," he mewed.

I rolled my eyes. "I don't think the word 'grumpy' can describe Ashstar."

Scorchsun shrugged. "Maybe. But who would've known that *this* was the real Ashstar?"

"No one, honestly," I murmured softly. "Is it likely for him to be . . . I don't know, casted out?"

"If he continues this, then perhaps."

Creekpool who was listening to our conversation, slowed down until she was near us. "Hush you two!" she snapped. "You don't want Ashstar overhearing you now, do you?"

When Scorchsun and I shook our heads, Creekpool urged us to move faster and keep quiet. But the thing was, none of us wanted to stay silent. Not when we knew that Ashstar would brew nothing but more trouble.

We soon enough made it to the Skyclam border. From here, I could smell the strong scent of Skyclan mingling with our own. My pelt itched uncomfortably as I realized how strong the scents of both clans were. I hoped that a SkyClan patrol wouldn't show up and cut the slack of a border skirmish.

"Renew the scents," Ashstar ordered as he sniffed around.

"But the scents are already set," Creekpool meowed. Scorchsun looked at me and we shared an uneasy look.

"Just do it!" Ashstar growled, his tail lashing. "We don't know what those good-for-nothing Skyclan cats are up to."

"They aren't up to anything," Creekpool hissed. Ashstar narrowed his eyes at the dappled golden she-cat but whatever he was about was cut off when a rustle made everyone alert. The brambles trembled as a Skyclan patrol came into view.

There were at least four of them—balancing out ours. I felt somewhat relieved over this. My gaze went over to the patrol and I noticed that recognized a few of them. Ravenwing along with his apprentice Blackpaw, Stoneheart, and Petalshade. As I watched them, I couldn't help but notice how tense and uneasy they look as if something prior had happened.

"Ashstar," Stoneheart greeted coldly his light blue eyes glaring at him and our patrol. Scorchsun winced beside me.

"It's really not our fault Ashstar is being a complete wimp," he whispered to me. I murmured in agreement.

"I hope you skyclan cats kept to your side of he border," the dark gray tom sneered. Ravenwing and Petalshade shared a glance while Blackpaw lashed his tail angrily as he swept his gaze over us.

Just stop breathing at this point, I pleaded silently as I stared at Ashstar. *You're causing more and more trouble than there should be. There's a sick cat at our camp for StarClan's sake!*

"We SkyClan cats have kept to our borders. But if you, the leader of ThunderClan, are gonna come back to every patrol we bring with your own just because you want to show off how strong you are, you can shame your pelt on StarClan because whatever you're doing is ridiculous," Stoneheart snapped, his eyes were blazing with rage. "Stop acting like we crossed your border when your own clanmates know we haven't!"

"Clearly you can't tell that your own scent is off," Ashstar growled.

"What?" Petalshade protested. "Our scents are completely fine!"

"No, it's not!"

"You do this every time!" Ravenwing yowled. "Every time you are on this patrol, you accuse us of crossing the border."

"Because you guys have."

I stepped forward, my fur prickling out frantically. "Ashstar, stop this! There's no reason to fight over something that can't be proved."

Ashstar whirled around and towered over me. "Don't question me!"

"I will if our lives are in danger," I defended.

Scorchsun stepped up beside me and stared Ashstar down. "She's right. What you're doing is not rational."

I swallowed thickly as the old tom glowered at us. My heart beat erratically in my chest and I found myself shaking slightly. I had never thought of myself standing against Ashstar verbally, but if I were to be a leader that is what I'm meant to do.

Ashstar didn't respond to us instead he turned around and faced the SkyClan patrol. Silence stretched on between the two patrols as not one cat said a single word. And then it happened. It happened so fast I barely had time to register it.

"Attack!" Ashstar screeched surging forward and leaping onto Stoneheart. My eyes widened in horror as I drew a step back. Stoneheart let out a howl as his body disappeared under Ashstar's

"No!" Creekpool wailed but was cut off when Ravenwing threw himself on top of her. Her wail turned into a screech as she hit the ground with a painful thud.

"Cherryflare, watch out!" Scorchsun yelled and threw himself in front of me. I whipped my head around and saw Blackpaw clinging onto Dustflame's back. Dustflame hissed in pain as he tried to get the black tom off of him but to no avail. I jumped to my paws and threw myself onto Blackpaw and slammed him to the ground. He let

out a hiss of pain and quickly slammed his hind leg into my soft underbelly.

I cried out and drew back in pain. Blackpaw narrowed his eyes and surged out of my grip. Snarling, I raise my paws and slash them at Blackpaw's ear. A growl tore his lips when my claws made contact with his ear.

Blackpaw jumped away and crouched low, ready to leap. I panted and braced myself. He leaped forward—not up—gracefully but I was prepared and slammed my paw to his shoulder and threw him to the side and pinned him down, landing blows after blows on his shoulder. However, I managed to catch myself and stop at the moment.

What are you doing? Why are injuring an apprentice when this battle shouldn't even be happening?

"We shouldn't be fighting," I gasp. Blackpaw eyes narrowed at me.

"But we are," he snarled and jabbed his hind leg onto mines, throwing me off balance. I stumbled and yelped when Blackpaw leaped on me once more. I yowled in pain as I felt his claws connect with my pelt and felt him draw blood from the slashes he drew. Hissing in annoyance, I jab my forepaw out and hook my claws around Blackpaw's head and pulled down hard. Blackpaw screeched in pain and jumped away with a slash on his forehead.

Panting I looked around and saw ThunderClan locked in battle with Skyclan. Scorchsun and Petalshade were swiping at eachother, ears laid back, and teeth drawn. Creekpool was darting to and fro, swiping at Ravenwing. She had a few scratches over her shoulder and pelt but other than that she looked fine. On Skyclan territory, Ashstar was pinned down by Stoneheart. Even from here, I could see that they were talking to each other though it looked like Stoneheart was doing most of the talking and Ashstar did most of the glaring. Stoneheart glared at Ashstar once more before he drew back.

"SkyClan, fall back!" he called. The rest of the Skyclan let out furious hisses before they backed off and hurried over to their

border.

I quickly scrambled to my legs and ran over to where Ashstar was making his way over to the border. Creekpool and Scorchsun halted beside me and stared eye-wide at their leader. He had a wounds all over his back and pelt but luckily they weren't deep.

"Let's go," Ashstar panted. "It's not over, yet."

I squared my shoulders and felt a bubble of anger rising through me but I had the sense to keep quiet. He didn't even care if his own clanmates were injured and here he was, fantasizing another skirmish when they barely got through this one. In fact, I was sure the only reason Stoneheart pulled back was that he didn't want to fight either. Not over something like this.

Ceekpool stepped forward, her eyes slit in rage. "Ashstar, what was the meaning of this?"

Ashstar kept silent and padded through the forest with us right behind him. I was annoyed that he kept silent and just heartbeats ago he was screaming at us because he thought he was rght and everyone was being ignorant. When he didn't answer, Scorchsun lashed his tail and drew back.

"Leave it," he snarled softly. "It's not worth it. He's not worth of leading."

Because right now, I knew that Ashstar had brought the whole Dark Forest on his shoulders. And there was no way he was heading back.

25 | apprehension

(This chapter will switch POVs)

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4/19

S I L E N T

Rain splashed all over my pelt as I dashed through the dense forest, I huffed as I swerved out of the way of a huge log in front of me and my eyes narrowed.

A huge bolt of thunder was heard from above me and I quickened my pace.

I jumped through the last of the thicket and stopped in my tracks, rain was pouring down from above and more thunder could be heard from all around the mountain range.

Stoneheart was breathing heavily in front of me, the toms pelt was drenched and his eyes looked heavy. Mallowtail was sniffing the air with his mouth agape while Snowpebble was sniffing the ground before removing a large vine from his back.

Every cat was tired and drenched from the rain. That morning the dawn patrol had picked up the scent of a fox near the Thunderclan border but due to the rain the scents was lost to the patrol. Finchstar had ordered every patrol to be careful but as Snowpebble and Stoneheart had gone with Parsleyseed and Ivypaw to collect herbs the fox had shown it's self.

Due to the rain and the fact that only two warriors were present the fox had bested them and followed a terrified Ivypaw back to camp as the silver she-cat had fled the scene.

Stoneheart and Snowpebble were able to keep it from finding Skyclan camp but they needed help chasing it back to where it

came from.

Mallowtail and the rest of the mentors had decided to bump up us apprentices training over the next few moons in case of more rouge attacks. Mallowtail was keen on teaching me different ways of fighting cats and other forest creatures who were bigger and stronger then me.

We had always practiced this before but he wanted me to get more extreme lessons because of my height difference compared to other apprentices or even other she-cats.

Mallowtail told me what bigger cats usually dealt with bigger animals like racoons, foxes, and badgers because they were the strongest warriors. I didn't like this stereotype at all, any warrior of any size could help take on a badger or a fox if they were trained well enough.

By following this you could say that a cat like Dawnsky could not fight foxes and badgers to defend her clan when every cat knows Dawnsky is a well trained warrior and could easily take on another warrior like Stoneheart or Cloudfur and have a even match.

While I was mostly trained for fighting bigger creatures slim cats like Leafpaw and Blackpaw were trained in tree climbing skills more intensely. I envied them for that because I always loved the feeling of jumping from branch to branch and going as high as I could until it felt like I could reach out and touch the clouds with my paw.

A loud breaking of a twig caught my attention and I turned my head to see a pair of yellow eyes glaring at me through the undergrowth and suddenly a loud snarling was heard from the other side of the clearing.

"There's two of them!" I yowled and jumped into a hunters crouch as the fox slowly stepped out of the undergrowth and snarled at me hungerly.

I heard Mallowtail snarl furiously and he yowled for us all to hear, "Stoneheart with me Snowpebble with Silentpaw. Work as a team to

fight you're fox and don't leave you're partner!" Mallowtail finished just as their fox snarled at them and leaped towards them.

Snowpebble was at my side with his ears flattened and his teeth bared, the fox glared at us both while trying to pick who to attack first.

Snowpebble flicked his ear and whispered to me, "I hope you've learned enough from Mallowtail flat ears." The tom hissed and narrowed his eyes.

The fox took Snowpebbles lack of focus to strike and he jumped at us with his teeth snarling ready to tear into a cats flesh. I quickly jumped out of the foxes way and rounded so I was now behind the fox.

Snowpebble had a wobbly jump away from the fox but he had got to his paws and I flicked my tail towards the foxes back legs and slashing tail.

Without waiting for another thought I leaped forwards with my claws unsheathed and hooked myself onto the foxes tail. The fox let out a roar of pain and started snapping his jaws at me to get me off of his tail but I clung on tight.

Snowpebble took his chance of confusion from the fox and leaped onto the foxes back neck and sunk his teeth into his scruff. The fox yowled loudly and snapped its head around quick enough to catch a hold of my scruff.

I hissed in pain as the thorn sharp teeth sunk into my scruff and the stench of the foxes breath hit my nose. I cried in pain as the fox started to shake me like a piece of prey.

I couldn't let this go on or the fox would eventually snap my neck so I quickly snapped my head to the side and extended my claws before tearing them into one of the eyes of the fox. The fox let out a roar of pain and quickly let go of my scruff sending me flying across the clearing and tumbling into the wet dirt.

Rain splashed my blood soaked neck and I huffed and panted whole

trying to catch my breath. I opened my eyes to see the fox I was just fighting whimpering on the ground while a pool of blood poured from its face.

Snowpebble was giving the fox shoulder blows to drive it away while Stoneheart and Mallowtail were backing up their fox into a corner and swiping at its muzzle.

The thunder cracked in the sky as the fox Snowpebble was fighting fled the clearing back towards the mountain range while Stonehearts and Mallowtails followed it right after.

I sat myself up and began licking the fox bite on my neck and the taste of my own blood made me shiver. Snowpebble turned to me and padded over with a respectful nod, "You're a talented fighter, I haven't seen a move like that used since I was a apprentice." Snowpebble mewed and I looked at the tom stunned for a moment before nodding my thanks.

Mallowtail soon trotted over to us and his eyes softened when he saw my bloody neck, "You okay kit?" My mentor asked and I nodded once again as I could still feel the shock running through my body.

Snowpebble had a few scratches on his shoulder while Stoneheart and Mallowtail both looked scared all over their backs.

"Lets head back to camp." Stoneheart mewed and flexed his claws before starting to trot back towards camp.

The rain was not looking like it would stop any time soon and the thunder continued to crackle as we had our way back to camp.

* * *

My neck burned like fury and the image of the fox grabbed me and playing with me like a piece of prey. The smell of its breath stayed on the back of my neck like lice on the elders tails.

Parsleyseed sniffed at my neck and groomed my fur aside so the wound was more visible. Ivypaw was at the herb store looking for the right herbs while Parsleyseed hissed orders.

"Get me Chervil, cobwebs, dock leaves, marigold, and thyme!" Parsleyseed hissed out loud and I placed my paws over my flat ears. "Ok, I should just bring you the whole herb store!" Ivypaw hissed at Parsleyseed who flattened his ears and huffed in annoyance.

Glad to see at least one cat can handle Parsleyseeds attitude... I thought and clawed at the ground as the pain worsened.

Ivypaw rushed over to me and gently smeared some weird messing stuff over my wounds while also placing some seeds in front of my muzzle. "Eat those poppy seeds it will give strength and help with the pain." Ivypaw mewed and sat down at my side.

Parsleyseed how sat down next to Snowpebble talking to him quietly while Mallowtail and Stoneheart were speaking with Finchstar and the other warriors outside.

I wonder if Leafpaw is worried.. I thought and tucked my paws under me. Me and Leafpaw have to cold to each other since the day we caught each other with our forbidden friends. Leafpaw had acted like I didn't exist and I avoided her at all costs.

I wondered every night how she met the young Shadowclan apprentice whos named I learned was Thornpaw.

How did they get close? Why does she meet with him? Are they as close as me and her were? Could they be more then just forbidden friends..? I shook the thoughts from my head. I don't care what Leafpaw does with that Shadowclan fox breath.

"What's up with you and Leafpaw?" Ivypaws mew cut me off guard and I turned a sharp gaze to Ivypaws.

"Nothing, why?" I asked and turned to my paws while Ivypaw huffed, "You two are obviously fighting. The whole clan can tell, so tell me, what's wrong?" Ivypaw said while pressing down on my wound.

I hissed out loud before reply, "I doubt the whole clan knows, also it was a simple fight between kin. That's all." I mewed sternly and got up from my nest.

"The wound is easing up I'll be fine to rest in the apprentices den for now. Thanks for the help Ivypaw." I mewed without meeting the medicine cat apprentices gaze and stalked out of the medicine cat den.

I heard Ivypaw about to follow me but the flicked my tail before stepping out of the medicine cat den. The clan looked full and anxious, Finchstar was speaking with Mallowtail by the fresh kill pile while Stoneheart was nuzzling Leapfight into front of the nursery.

Cloudfur, Embernose, and Petalshade were talking outside of the warriors den. Petalshade had announced a quarter moon ago that she was expecting kits once again and I could see her belly gently rounded with Embernose kits. Swiftleap and Ivypaw—Petalshade's and Embernose's previous litter—were completely shocked by the news. Ivypaw was super excited about having new siblings and Swiftleap declared he couldn't wait to have more new siblings. Though, Blackpaw didn't share their excitement as much—not that anyone cared. Mouseclaw, Dawnsky, Ravenwing, and Blackpaw were stepping into the camp with jaws full of prey.

Swiftleap and Honeywisp were walking over to the fresh kill waiting for the prey to be placed in the fresh kill. Leafpaw was speaking with the elders outside of the elders den while giving me a side glance before turning back to Foxwhisker.

I hissed softly before watching the hunting patrol drop off their prey and stalking over to get my own share. I picked up a small shrew before I felt someone tap my shoulder with their tale, "Come lets share." Mouseclaw mewed and pushing me towards the grass patch at the bottom of the rockslide path.

I placed down my shrew and sat besides Mouseclaw who bite first into the shrew. "Fighting with you're sister?" Mouseclaw asked before pushing the shrew back towards me.

I unsheathed my claws and scrapped them against the grass before ripping off a chunk of meat from the shrew. "Nothing is going on. We all get into pointless arguments, like you and Embernose." I hissed before pushing the shrew back towards him and sitting up.

"I'm going rest." I mewed before walking away from Mouseclaw before he could say anything.

I laid down in my nest and hissed in anger. *I just want to sleep.*. I thought and a idea popped in my head, maybe I can go find Hawk later! Yes! I can get my mind off of Leafpaw.

Excitement filled my paws and I felt like jumping from my nest and running towards where I last saw Hawk but I knew it would be a stupid decision. I sighed softly before tucking my muzzle into my paws and falling asleep.

L E A F

"And that's how Grayhollow, Russetbreeze, and I managed to drive the badger out," Foxwhisker finished. I gripped the mouse bile tightly and dabbed it onto the swollen spot on Flakenose's tail.

"And done! Finally, these mouse biles stink," I mewed aloud and set it off to the side. I heard an irritated snort from Flowerheart but ignored it. Instead I turned to Foxwhisker and stare at him with wide eyes.

"Just the three of you?" I ask in bewilderment.

"Oh yes," Foxwhisker said proudly. "It wasn't an easy fight but I suppose none of us wanted to back down."

"Oh for star clan sake," Flakenose snaps, glaring at the reddish tom. "Stop putting thistle downs in the apprentices head!"

"Why, I am not!" Foxwhisker exclaims. "I'm telling the truth."

"Oh so you expect me to believe that you and two other warriors took a badger down without any help? A whole full patrol can't take it down and you expect three to do it?" Flakenose snaps.

Foxwhisker shook his head. "You weren't there," he tells her and then turns to me. "But it's true alright. We didn't take the badger down but I suppose he didn't want a fight and left."

"You see? There's always a twist to your stories!"

"Flakenose, why, you have no sense of fun and always ruin it These young 'uns ought to know our past and be proud."

I let out a sigh and quietly got up from my spot as the two elders continued their bickering. I snatch up the mouse bile and head out of the den, flattening my ears in response as rain drops pattered the ground. I made my way over to the dirt pile and dropped the smelly bile into a hole and covered it up.

"That does it," I mewed and pad away. I looked around the camp and saw nothing but cold and wetness holing up the place. Cats took shelter under dens or under brambles but luckily it wasn't raining as hard as it was earlier. Though, as I looked around the camp, I didn't see Silentpaw anywhere. I wasn't even sure I wanted to face her after what happened that night.

Ever since Hawk had escaped, the entire clan became restless. Their only source for rouges was gone and my sister helped her escape. The whole thing was bizarre. I didn't even know why I was keeping her secret when I could tell everyone. But the thought of doing that seemed even worse than avoiding Silentpaw.

Even though we weren't talking to each other, she was still my sister and I would never want to hurt her in that way. Not when I knew Hawk meant a lot to her. And she hadn't said anything about my meeting with Thornpaw either, so it would only be fair to not say anything.

I was about the hurry through the rain when Dawnsky's black and white pelt flashed through and made her way over to me.

"Hey, are you free at the moment?" she questioned. I nodded in response.

"Okay, good. We're going to be training," she mewed and flicked her tail at me.

"What? In this rain?" I exclaimed, padding after her.

"We can't push our training back," Dawnsky meowed firmly. Besides the entrance, Blackpaw and Ravenwing were waiting patiently.

"Finally!" Blackpaw snapped. "It took you forever didn't it!"

Never mind, scratch that.

"Hush, Blackpaw! We barely stood here," Ravenwing hissed. "So stop complaining."

Muttering to himself, Blackpaw walked on ahead while Dawnsky, Ravenwing and I followed. "What are we going to do?"

"Tree climbing. We're gonna learn more ways to attack," Dawnsky replied.

"In the rain?" I mewed. "But that's—"

"I was against the decision too but Finchstar insisted. It's for the best."

"Yeah! Broken legs that is," Blackpaw called and I silently agreed. Tree climbing was always dangerous but now with rain it became even more hazardous. I found myself fluffing out my fur in worry and cold. As I padded through the woods with fluffed fur and drooped ears, I picked up a conversation Blackpaw and Ravenwing were having.

"I'm still confused on why Thunderclan would attack us," Blackpaw mewed. I then realized that he was talking about the border skirmish with Thundeclan two days ago. I remember the Stoneheart's patrol coming into the camp with scratches and missing fur though luckily the injuries were minor.

"It's Ashstar," Ravenwing replied. "He's weakening his clan

My fur prickled uneasily as my gaze shifted over to Blackpaw; his eyes held a glow that I couldn't pin down what it was. I narrowed my eyes at him suspiciously. "You think so? Isn't that bad for Thunderclan itself?"

"Without a strong leader, the clan can be lost into chaos, so perhaps," Ravenwing murmured wistfully. He shook his head and moved on leaving Blackpaw with a glint in his eyes. The look made my fur stand up and I couldn't help but feel that he was up to

something. But I had no idea what.

The group walked on in silence but my thoughts were burning with questions.

"We're here," Ravenwing meowed halting where the trees were thick and very tall, stretching further and further into the sky. I snapped out of my thoughts and quickly looked up. He turned to me and Blackpaw and mewed, "Well, start climbing."

"Aren't you gonna teach us new tactics?" I whined, not wanting to climb the wet, slippery bark.

"We have to be on the trees, mouse-brain," Dawnsky said. "Now climb!"

Scowling, I grip my claws onto the wet bark and scrambled up the trunk. Every now and then, my paws would slip or lose grip on the trunk.

Great starclan, I'm sure I'll fall off any second, I thought, a burst of panic settling through me.

"You're doing great!" Dawnsky called from another tree nearby. I could see the flash of her pelt as she disappeared among the newly buds and leaves on the branches.

Wow, thank you. So helpful, I thought mockingly but continued my way up. Soon enough I saw Blackpaw's pelt standing on top of a branch and struggled my way up. Once I was a few mouse-tail length away from the branch, I bunched my muscles and leaped toward it.

I managed to hook my claws onto the branch but slipped at the last moment causing me to lose my balance and grip. A cry tore out from my throat as my paws furiously scrabbled against the bark but I wasn't able to get a hold.

"Hold on!" Blackpaw's yowl rang out and he quickly flashed forward, and sank his teeth into my scruff, hauling me over. I gasped for breath and sat down.

"Thanks," I grunted. "Though I'm surprised you didn't let me fall."

"Oh I would've if it weren't for our mentors," Blackpaw mewed and shook out his fur. I got up and just then, Dawnsky leaped out of no where and landed besides us.

"Is the new tactic we're learning is about how to be squirrels?" I asked, flicking my ear as a drop of water dropped onto it.

"Is there seriously more tree tactics?" Blackpaw exclaimed before Dawnsky could say anything. "I thought we learned most of it at least."

"Stop complaining," Dawnsky mewed warily. "I understand you don't want to train under the rain but we must." She then turned away. "Now, we are going to learn a new way to surprise our enemies."

Dawnsky padded up the branch and looked down. Just below us was Ravenwing crouching. Dawnsky balanced on the branch neatly, keep her paws firmly intact. She crouched down and shifted around until she made sure she was under him and then jumped off the branch. Blackpaw and I peer over the edge just in time to see Dawnsky forepaws gripping Ravenwing's shoulder before her hind leg crashed down on top of him. Ravenwing let out a shocked yowl as his legs buckled underneath him.

His shoulder had broke Dawnsky's long jump and instead of her plastered onto Ravenwing, she towered over him, her paw extended.

"Get off me," Ravenwing mewed good humorously. Dawnsky purred and scrambled off of him.

"That's a neat trick," I meowed, my voice filled with excitement. Blackpaw just nodded.

"Now I want you guys to try! Try first losing us and then jump. Remember, use the enemies shoulder to break your fall or expect broken bones!" Dawnsky yowled to us, her head pointing upwards.

I stepped back and turned to Blackpaw. "We should move to

another tree, and circle around to confuse them. Once we lose them, we can aim directly above them."

The black tom nodded. "Let's do it."

I unsheathed my claws, and crouched down before leaping onto another branch and began moving one tree to another. The rain still hadn't eased, much to our dismay, so the barks were newly wet and slippery which made it harder to land. If we were to make a "surprise attack", we'd have to stay inconspicuous and not rattle the branches so that leaves would shower everywhere and give us away.

Dawnsky and Ravenwing had moved on from their previous spots. They were now trying to hunt in the rain though I knew that it would be difficult.

"You take Dawnsky, I'll take Ravenwing," Blackpaw hissed before swerving toward Ravenwing. I whipped my head around trying to find where Dawnsky was then stopped when I saw her a few fox tail lenghts away. I leaped toward the other branch and scrabbled my hind legs against it furiously. Making sure to keep my paws light, I peered over the branch and saw Dawnsky, oblivious to me above her.

I took a step back and took a deep breath before jumping off. At first, panic took over me and I gasped as all my senses were thrown all over the place but I remembered how Dawnsky jumped gracefully so that her forepaws were facing down and her hind legs were positioned above—that ways when she crashed upon her enemy, her forepaws would break her fall and she wouldn't just crash onto them. Fighting the the fierce wind, I positioned myself and yowled loudly as I plunged down.

Dawnsky went rigid and looked up just in time to see me crashing down upon her. She let out a screech and buckled underneath my weight but luckily her shoulder broke my fall, and I stood over her, pinning her down with gleaming eyes.

"How was that?" I yowled.

Dawnsky purred with laughter. "That was amazing! But get off me, I can barely breathe."

Purring, I swiftly got off her only to hear Ravenwing's yowl. I shared a look with Dawnsky. The two of us headed over to where he was and saw Blackpaw padding off of Ravenwing with a smug look on his face while Ravenwing shook his fur, shaking off wet leaves and dirt.

"That was really good," he mewed to Blackpaw who lashed his tail in satisfaction.

"You two did really good though you may have to polish it up," Dawnsky said and turned to me. "When you jumped you were making a huge ruckus that would've alerted any enemy. You need to keep in mind that some enemies can recover quickly from your attack and instead of you surprising them, they'll surprise you. Next time, don't make any loud noises that *will* give you away."

I nodded, feeling eager.

"Blackpaw, you need to position yourself correctly," Ravenwing added. "If it weren't for my shoulder, you'd be in broken pieces. Remember to land on your forepaws then have your hind legs come down. It softens the landing and decreases the chance of shock from the fall."

Blackpaw narrowed his eyes at his mentor but gave a slow nod.

"We'll continue for a bit more. I'll teach you something new," Dawnsky mewed and looked up. "I don't think the rain will be easing any time soon anyways."

* * *

My paws felt as they were about to fall off as I slowly walked into the camp. After all the tree climbing training, my paws were sore from gripping the slithery bark and jumping from the branches. I was sure they'd fall any second.

Exhausted, I stumbled through the entrance and flicked my ear irritably as rain drops splattered on my pelt. It had rained the whole

afternoon and I was sure it would rain for the entire day. Luckily, Dawnsky excused me of any other work for the day and said I could rest.

"Good work!" Dawksky called before making her way over to where Mallowtail was sheltering under a bramble. I saw the two touching noses and brushing their muzzles together before the two settled down, grooming each other. As I watched them for a bit, my mind flashed toward Thornpaw but I quickly shoved the thought away.

What am I thinking? We're not like that. We're just friends, I scolded myself. Just then, I saw Silentpaw walking out of the apprentice den with green muck all over her pelt. I halted when I saw her and the orange-reddish molly also stopped in her tracks when she saw me.

I wanted to head over to her and ask her what happened but my paws were glued to the ground, preventing me from going. The two of us stared at each other in an uncomfortable silence until finally, Silentpaw looked away and padded over to her den and disappearing.

My heart clenched softly and I unsheathe my claws, digging them into the ground in rage. *Why didn't I go over to her?* I thought, furious with myself.

Sighing wearily, I padded over to the fresh-kill pile and dragged out a soggy sparrow, trying not to mind the sogginess. There wasn't really much to be done about that.

My paws took me over to a dry place under some bushes and settled down, enjoying the dryness and warmth it provided, and took a bite of the miserable piece of prey. As I relished my meal, I heard paw steps heading my way. I looked up expecting to see Silentpaw but felt a tug of disappointment when it was Honeywisp instead.

"Hey," she purred. "Make some room for me, will ya?"

I shifted to the side, inclining more space as Honeywisp sat down beside me. "What's up?" I asked her, suddenly curious.

The pale ginger she-cat was silent for a bit. Her green eyes were gazing out into the camp; they held a faraway look. My gaze followed hers but wasn't able to pinpoint on exactly what she was looking at.

"Spit it out, will you?" I mewed, getting impatient.

"Well, I really don't know how to begin," Honeywisp admitted. She then let out a long sigh. "Remember when you told me to talk with Finchstar about how I felt?"

I nodded and leaned forward, wondering about what she will say next.

"Well, I took your advice," she meowed proudly and looked at me. I let out gasp, surprise rippling through me. Abandoning my prey, I moved closer.

"Really? How did it go?" I ask excitedly.

"It went good." Honeywisp's eyes gleamed. "I went to talk with her yesterday and I told her how I felt about well—everything I guess. When I told her, she was surprised as if she didn't realized how much her neglecting affected me—which is a funny thing to think but I think she meant it. Finchstar apologized for not being the motherly figure I wanted her to be."

"I see," I murmured, not knowing how to feel about Finchstar. Honeywisp must've seen my doubt so she added on.

"After she apologized, she admits that she felt guilty about her actions. I guess its also hard on her because she's a leader *and* she broke up with Cloudfur. But she's willing to make up for it."

"Oh really?"

"Yep! I'm glad that our relationship doesn't have to be strained anymore," Honeywisp said and then turned to me. "Thank you for helping me out. You're like the first ever cat to step out to help me."

A purr rumbled through my throat. "I'm just glad I can help. You know, cherish the ones you have and before you know it, they can

be gone before you can fix anything," I said, my mind flashing to Willownose.

Suddenly, sadness crashed over me as I thought about Willownose. I suddenly missed her gentle voice and comforting words. She was always there for me and Silentpaw. I wished that she was here and that she could help whatever both of us are going through. My heart clenched with pain as I settled my head down on my paws.

Honeywisp blinked at me and her eyes softened. She touched her nose to my ear in sympathy. "It must be hard," she murmured. "Losing your mother so young. I wish I could help more."

I shook my head. "No. You already help by being my friend," I tell her. "That's good enough."

Honeywisp purred and got up. "Well, I have to get going," she mewed. "I'll talk to you later then." And then with that she left the brambles. I cleaned up the mess and walked into the rain. Just then, I saw a flash of silver pelt on the side of my vision. Ivypaw was padding out of her den and was making her way over to the fresh-kill pile. I had a sudden urge to ask her something so I quickly headed over to her.

"Hey," I called. Ivypaw looked up, a blackbird hinged in her jaw. "I need to ask you something."

"And I need you to leave me in peace," she joked then flicked her ear. "What's up?"

"Oh, well, I saw Silentpaw with herbs all over her pelt. Is she okay?"

Ivypaw rolled her eyes. "Why not just ask her?"

"Oh—well, it's not that easy," I stammered.

"Oh really?" The silver and black she-cat mewed wryly. "The last time I looked you two were close."

My throat went dry. *So she knows,* I thought. Ivypaw sighed and set down her prey. "She got injured from a fox fight."

"She's alright, right?"

"Alive and breathing," she assured. "Listen, when I asked Silentpaw about she didn't answer me but seriously what's going on between you two?"

I looked down, feeling the heat creeping up to my pelt. "Nothing much," I mumbled.

"Nothing much eh?" Ivypaw sighed. "Why am I not surprised? You guys got to fix this mess up. Pains me to see you two not talking and upset."

"I will," I confirmed. *I'll try.*

Ivypaw then bid her farewell and then went over to a dry spot to enjoy her meal. I was about to head into the apprentice den when the entrance rattled revealing Mouseclaw, Cloudfur, and Swiftleap all coming back from their border patrol. They all had a simple piece of prey. They all dropped their prey to the fresh-kill pile while Cloudfur went over to Finchstar to report.

"Mouseclaw!" I purred, hurrying over to my father. Mouseclaw turned his head, his eyes glowing as he saw me. I stopped in front of him and he leaned forward, nuzzling my ear.

"Leafpaw," he greeted. "Is everything alright?"

"Yeah, of course. Why?" I asked. Just then, I saw a flash of orange-reddish fur. Tilting my head up I saw Silentpaw padding out of her den and was slipping down.

Mouseclaw noticed Silentpaw and then looked down at me. "What's wrong with the two of you?" he questioned, ignoring my statement. "I asked her the same thing and she refused to answer, pushing me away in the process." He shook his head. "I don't understand what argument could've made you two so angry at each other but you can't keep ignoring each other."

I shrugged, trying to make it seem not like a big deal. "Don't worry, it's nothing we can't handle," said, trying to look cheerful but Mouseclaw gave me a doubtful glance.

"Yeah, exactly. You guys can't handle it so you decide to ignore each other," he meowed wryly. Letting out a sigh, Mouseclaw signaled me to come closer. I then realized how weary and tired my father looked. It then dawned upon me that Willownose's death had hit him much harder than any of us. And then there was us—the only memories of his mate left yet we pushed him away when he wanted to help us. And now, we are left torn. Guilt clawed through me as I realized how much it pain Mouseclaw must be going through with his daughters aloofness and us breaking our bond.

"I have no right to intervene in your argument—which you two made it clear that you don't want me to. Arguments happen and it's normal to get angry. But for a real bond and trusting relationship, you have to mend up the argument. If you are truly sisters, you must find a way to understand each other and fix whatever happened. Ignoring each other won't solve anything. Just—just keep that in mind."

I turned away from him, my gaze flicking over to Silentpaw before turning away. "Yeah I will."

Mouseclaw turned away from me and shuffled through the fresh-kill while I made my way over to the den, wanting some sleep for a bit. As my paws carried over the Rockslide, I tried to ignore Silentpaw as we brushed passed each other. I slipped into the cool, shady den and sank into my nest, curling into a ball.

I ought to make it up to Mouseclaw. He's our father after all and he has a point—I can't keep ignoring her. I did miss our bond and miss spending time with her. But even so, we she accept it? Will she accept Thornpaw and I?

Maybe I should see him again. He deserves an explanation after what happened. And maybe he can help us out...

3 R D P O V

The trees seemed to part ways as the moon light fluttered down on Silentpaw's reddish-orange pelt. The tall apprentice had just exited Skyclan camp and was on her way to visit the place where she had last seen her rouge friend.

Silentpaw was a swift apprentice with nimble paws and it was easy for her to dash through the undergrowth without awakening a single sleeping vole or bird.

The night was quiet as she ran. A distant owl watched the deep undergrowth near by while a wolf howled at the top of the mountain range, another wolf howling a response.

Silentpaw ducked under a fallen branch before she reached the clearing where her and Hawk had come face to face with Leafpaw and Thornpaw. She stopped in her tracks and sniffed around the undergrowth Hawk had went through.

Silentpaw could smell a faint scent of Hawk but the rain had scattered the scent making it hard to render.

I'll just have to hope for the best. The she-cat thought and shook her head before pushing through the undergrowth towards the edge of Skyclan territory.

The forest outside of Skyclan territory looked so unwelcoming to Silentpaw but she desperately wanted to see Hawk and make sure the calico had gotten back to rouge territory safely. Silentpaw swallowed back her anxiety and continued on her way.

While Silentpaw was making her way through the dense woods, father away from the borders, Leafpaw was swiftly trotting through the woods with ease. The rain had finally stopped and now a cool night breeze shifted through her fur making her purr with delight.

The sky had cleared up and not a speck of cloud was to be seen in the shining starry sky. Her paws carried her through the green forest as if they knew where to go.

It's such a beautiful place, she thought as she scurried along toward the Shadowclan border. Without even thinking, Leafpaw halted in front of a tree and threw herself onto the trunk. She began to climb up the tree with proficiency, and Leafpaw was suddenly glad of all those long, tiring tree lessons she took with Dawnsky.

They certainly have done some good, she thought. Now, Leafpaw

climbed and jumped from tree to tree with precision and she no longer felt the fear of falling to the ground and injuring herself. The sharp wind whipped through her fur as her paws from one branch to another. The leaves whooshed while there were occasional scuffing and chittering of night animals on the ground.

I'm going to surprise Thornpaw by dropping in front of him, she thought good humorously as she saw the Shadowclan border in the distance. *Just you wait, you thorn matted fur-ball!*

While Leafpaw Climbed up the trees in the dead of night Silentpaw was creeping just outside of the Skyclan border.

The scents of Skyclan cats were behind her now and she was sniffing the air trying to get at least one wiff of Hawk or of any rouge. Silentpaws ears perked at the slight sound of the whooshing under growth near by and she bolted into the cover of a near by rock pile while peaking to see who was near.

The reddish brown she-cat had her tail laid out by her side while her claws dug deep into the wet ground. The sound of thudding paw steps started to appear and Silentpaw ducked back under the rock pile just in time to see a cat jump from the under growth and start sniffing at the Skyclan border.

The shadows covered the cats pelt and the fresh smell of wet grass from the rain had hidden the cats scents.

Silentpaw snarled slightly before creeping around the rock pile so she could get a better look at the cats. The cats fur was fluffy but it's back seemed to stand on end as it got closer and closer to the Skyclan border.

Finally after a moment of hesitation the cat stepped a gentle paw over the scent lines and Silentpaw hunched her shoulders, ready to leap at the cat before it could get any further.

As the cat shifted its ears at a bird shuffling in the under growth near by, Silentpaw leaped and aimed her front paws at the intruders shoulders.

The cat had realized it was not alone and turned to Silentpaw but it was too late and Silentpaws front paws slammed into the cats shoulders sending them both tumbling into the under growth.

Silentpaw hissed in pain as she rolled into the under growth and landed with a thud.

The cat who had shown its self on Skyclan territory was laid out on the grass with looking dazed and Silentpaw quickly jumped to her senses and stood to face the intruder when a familiar face looked up at her.

"Silentpaw!" Yowled the familiar calico who jumped from the grassy patch and tackled Silentpaw to the ground in a playful rustle. Silentpaw squeaked in alarm as the rolled onto the ground and the calico let out a amused *mrrow* of laughter as she pinned Silentpaw to the ground.

"You've still got the worst eye sight of the whole Mountain Range huh?" Hawk mewed playfully and Silentpaw battered at the calico with her paw, "You know its hard for every cat to see in the dark! Now get off me you flee!"

Hawk rolled onto the grass patch on the side of Silentpaw and stared at the sky and only then did Silentpaw realize how beautiful Silver Pelt looked at this time of night.

The quiet night breeze fluttered through Silentpaws pelt and she rolled onto her back like Hawk to stare up at the sky more clearly.

Hawk was staring up at the sky with gleam in her eyes and Silentpaw couldn't seem to decide which was more alluring. Hawks breath taking forest green eyes or the glittering sky of Silver Pelt.

Leafpaw's pelt rippled in the moonlight as she suddenly stopped leaping when a familiar scent caught her. Her claws gripped tightly against the rough, splintered branch as she tasted the air. *Thornpaw!* she thought, tipping her head down from the branch.

Leafpaw frowned when she couldn't get a glimpse of Thornpaw's dark matted pelt but told herself quickly that in the dark—with a

cat who also had dark pelt—it wouldn't be easy to see *any* cat. However, the she-cat refused to give-up, determined to give the Shadowclan apprentice a scare. Her gaze raked the clearing when her eyes caught on a moving creature right next to a small brook.

Her ears twitched at the sound of the rushing water and wondered what would happen if she made a wrong move and fell straight into the brook—and it's very shallow. She shook her head and positioned herself, praying to starclan that she made the jump correctly then plunged straight down as she did during practice. The branch rustled shaking off a few leaves and leaving them swaying down to the ground.

Leafpaw threw her head back in a silent yowl as leaves fluttered down. Thornpaw noticed the falling leaves and lifted his head, confused, when his eyes adjusted to Leafpaw plundering right on him. He let out screech of shock as his leg buckled as the reddish she-cat crashed onto him.

Eyes gleaming, Leafpaw towered over him and let out an amused purr when he stared at her dazed.

"Wha—Leafpaw?" he muttered, lifting his head. His eyes then widened and he let out a purr of laughter. "What are you doing? Get off me, frog-brain!"

"Frog-brain yourself!" Leafpaw meowed as she scrambled off him. Thornpaw sat off and shook leaf and dirt from his pelt. He then looked up at the tree where Leafpaw had jumped off from, his eyes widening slightly.

"I knew it!" he exclaimed, turning to Leafpaw. "Skyclan *are* squirrels."

Leafpaw snorted, unable to keep the laughter from her mew. "Oh yeah?"

"You came out of no where!" Thornpaw meowed, weaving around the reddish she-cat with a glint in his eyes. Leafpaw stared at him, wondering if she imagined the glow of admiration within his gaze. She then shook her head, pushing the thought away.

"I wanted to give you a real scare, but you were already at the border," Leafpaw complained. "How are you always early?"

"Maybe because you're too busy being a squirrel," Thornpaw teased and ducked when Leafpaw tried to cuff him. He then sat up and blinked at Leafpaw.

"Let's race and see who's the fastest," he meowed. Leafpaw jumped to her paw, her fur fluffed out and her tail lashing.

"Yes!"

Thornpaws purred and bent down to the brook and lapped the water. Leafpaw did the same and felt a burst of energy as the cool, refreshing water drained down her tongue.

"Catch me," Thornpaw hissed then quickly lapped up some water before breaking into a run. Leafpaw leaped after him yowling, "I thought we were going to see who's the fastest!"

Thornpaw ran through the undergrowth—they were now deep into forest territory so borders didn't matter—and crashed through some bushes. Leafpaw dashed after him, bursting through the bramble and thicket. While Thornpaw is fast, Leafpaw was gaining on him. She could see his dark pelt rippling through the thick trees.

Forcing her legs to move faster, Leafpaw felt as if she was being chased by a Windclan warrior as she streaked toward Thornpaw. The breeze flew through her fur luxuriously and everything flashed past her in a blur. Leafpaw felt as if she flying through the woods and couldn't retain a soft yowl. Happiness and content warmed her pelt as she caught up with Thornpaw.

Bunching her muscles, she sprang forward and felt her forepaws rake Thornpaw's flank. She heard him let out a yelp of surprise. The two tumbled down a small slope and crashed at the bottom with Leafpaw towering over Thornpaw with a gleam in her green-blue eyes.

"Got you, mouse-brain," she mewed, smugness written all over her face. Thornpaw didn't respond so Leafpaw leaned closer and saw

that his cheeks were puffed out as if he has something in his mouth. Before she could say anything, Thornpaw released the pressure from his mouth and spat out the water that he was holding onto Leafpaw's face.

The reddish she-cat let out a shriek of surprise and recoiled away from the dark brown tom. Thornpaw sat up and let out a *mrrow* of laughter as he watched Leafpaw sink to the ground, whining, while rubbing her wet face. Her paws stumbled everywhere as panic took over her.

"Agh!" she cried, shaking water droplets from her chin. She fixed Thornpaw a glare. "What was that for?"

Thornpaw shrugged. "Payback for jumping on my back like that."

Leafpaw opened her mouth but then clamped it shut. "Oh," she mewed. "Well, I guess it's even then but water seriously?"

"Hey, you're not Riverclan so it worked didn't it? I gave you a good scare," he purred, nudging Leafpaw's shoulder. Leafpaw sighed before she sat down and began grooming her stuck-out fur.

The stars glimmered in the sky as the two pars of forbidden friends gazed up at them.

Hawk and Silentpaw laid down on there backs staring up at the stars in a small clearing. Leafpaw and Thornpaw were both sat in a dense part of the forest behond clan borders, the tree tops were dense but there was a big enough hole in the leaves for the two to look up at the stars.

Both of the sisters felt at peace with themselves while with their forbidden friends. But one thing manifested in both of their heads at the same time as a dark cloud blew away from the moon and shined down its glorious light.

This battle is no where near over.

***

a/n: Only chapter 26 and the epilogue left! Stayed tuned ;)

—Caption and Foxy

26 | final stand

4/22

S I L E N T

Today felt like a normal Skyclan morning, or however normal the clans were now a days.

The chilly breeze carried through the camp, brushing past cats furs and leaving them yearning for fresh grass under their paws instead of the frosty ground as they hunted or patrolled the Skyclan forest.

The clan was gathered around Mallowtail has the deputy began to assign patrols.

"Honeywisp you will lead the Thunderclan dawn patrol with Dawnsky and Leafpaw." Mallowtail ordered to the pale ginger she-cat who nodded her reply. Mallowtail scanned the clearing and his eyes landed on Snowpebble, "Snowpebble take Silentpaw with you on Shadowclan dawn patrol. We are slow on warriors at the moment so if there is any trouble rush back to camp for help." Mallowtail told Snowpebble who nodded and called me over with a flick of his white tail.

Mallowtail continued to assign patrols while me and Snowpebble moved to the other side of the clearing. "We'll leave before the other patrols so we can finish first and get good pickings in the fresh kill." Snowpebble whispered before we continued to the thorn barrier.

Before we could push through the thorn barrier I turned back towards the clearing and my eyes met Leafpaws. The two of us shared a stare for a few moments before tearing my gaze from my sisters and following after Snowpebble.

We pushed past the thorn tunnel when Snowpebble stopped in his tracks. The gray toms claws unsheathed and he narrowed his eyes.

I stared at him in confusion but then a faint sound of yowling entered my ears. I hissed in surprise as the panicked yowling started coming closer and closer.

Snowpebble got into a battle stance while I could smell the fear scent of the cats inside of camp just on the other side of the thorn barrier.

I stood closer to Snowpebble as we waited for the yowling to come closer. My mind raced with thoughts of what was yet to come, *is Thunderclan going to attack us? Are the rouges coming to take revenge on us for imprisoning Hawk? Did the rouges attack another clans camp and they were calling for help?*

The ideas were endless but they came to a end when I realized the yowling was how on the other side of the undergrowth. My back arched as the undergrowth quivered and a stocky dark gray figure blasted out of the undergrowth.

Their pelt was covered in bloody wounds and their dark green eyes sore with pain. Only when they looked up did I realize—
"Ashstar?!?" Snowpebble growled with a lash of his tail.

The Thunderclan leader looked up at us and with a heavy huff of breath he spoke, "Please, take me to Finchstar. M-my clan is being attacked by the rouges, I don't know how long they can hold them off!" Ashstar pleaded and I quickly raced back through the thorn barrier while Snowpebble walked into Ashstar.

The dark gray tom was limping heavily and he could barley pick up his head to look any cat in the eyes. We got into the clearing and everyone was already on edge due to Ashstars yowls that probably echoed the whole Mountain Range.

Finchstar raced down the rockslide path and stood in front of Ashstar while my clanmates gathered around to listen to what the Thunderclan leader had to say.

With the last of his energy Ashstar was able to meet Finchstars green gaze and he spoke in a raspy tone, "Finchstar you must help, my clan is under attack by the rouges and I think that this might be

all of the rouges. My warriors are greatly out numbered and these rouges are here to kill. Please, my clan needs to help of the other four clans!" Ashstar pleaded as he dropped his head and stared at the ground.

Finchstar nodded before backing away from Ashstar. "Parsleyseed! Ivypaw! Gather you're herbs their will be lots of injured cats. Hazelberry and Mistcreek will need help with. I want two patrols, Mallowtails patrol will be Snowpebble, Honeywisp, Swiftleap, and Silentpaw. And my patrol will be Mouseclaw, Dawnsky, Cloudfur, and Leafpaw." Finchstar ordered and I felt a rush of joy being able to fight along side my clanmates.

"The rest of you will stay here and guard the camp—" Finchstar was about to finish but was cut off by Blackpaw, "Finchstar! Won't we need the other clans help? If this is all the rouges we can use this to our advantage." Blackpaw stated which earned a hiss from Ravenwing who was at his side.

Finchstar gave him a stern look before nodding, "When you are done telling the other clans run straight back here do you understand?" Finchstar hissed and Blackpaw nodded.

With a flash Blackpaw took off through the thorn barrier and I eyed him before turning towards my patrol. Mallowtail was waving his patrol towards him while Finchstar was talking with Ashstar.

Parsleyseed did not bat an eye at Ashstars injuries but Ivypaw went over and was applying cobwebs to the worse of the wounds on his flank.

"Mallowtail take you're patrol first and we'll be right behind you!" Finchstar called and Mallowtail nodded before rashing through the thorn barrier towards the Thunderclan border with his patrol right behind him.

Snowpebble was running a bit behind Mallowtail with Swiftleap matching him while me and Honeywisp were at the rear.

This is going to be a battle to remember... I thought as we continued our way towards Thunderclan border.

* * *

The scents of the Thunderclan border were drawing closer and just then could I hear the panicked yowling of the Thunderclan warriors. The shrieks and cries of pain from the cats bathed my ears and made me wish I was deaf.

I could smell the fear scent of the cats around me and I realized that during this battle my clanmates would be fighting Hawks.

Hawks friends and her brother, and they would be fighting my kin and my friends... *Is this what Jaysong went through..?* I wondered.

The old Starclan cat had visited me while I was at the Moon Cave and told me a tale of when she was in love with a rouge she-cat named Arrow. But Arrows kin weren't threatening all 5 clans of the Mountain Range, Jaysong had no idea what she was on about.

I shook the thoughts of Jaysong away, I had to focus on the problem at paw right now.

Honeywisp flicked her tail in my face and gave me a nod of reassurance as we stopped at Thunderclans borders.

Mallowtail turned to the patrol with a look of nervousness, "We'll go into the group of attacking rouges first then Finchstars patrol will follow right behind us." Mallowtail explained before dashing past the Thunderclan border towards what I believe is there camp.

The forest seemed to become more and more dense as we got deeper into Thunderclan territory.

During the run I started remembering all the nursery tales the elders told us and the horror stories of the other four clans. Those tales shaped us into hating on the other clans and thinking they are as bad as badgers.

I remembered the tale Willownose told me and Leafpaw when we were kits the time when she and Mouseclaw had been cornered by a fox on a dawn patrol when the fox had just been chased out of Thunderclan territory.

My heart ached at the thought of my mother Willownose and the amazing stories she would tell me and Leafpaw as kits. I wish she was still here, maybe she could have helped us with the warrior training we struggled with or maybe she could have gave us advice for the situation we were both in at this very moment.

We could have used these times to grow more as a family but Starclan needed her and she followed them...

The battle where Willownose died flashed in my mind and I had always wanted to ask Leafpaw if she had seen the cats who had killed Willownose but I didn't wanna mess with my sisters grief.

I sniffed the air nervously as the scents of rouges became clear as they mixed with scents of Thunderclan. The yowling and wails of pain from the Thunderclan cats how sounded as if it was all around us and a part of me wanted to turn tail and run back to Skyclan camp but I know I couldn't do that.

Mallowtail stopped right in front of a big thorn bush and by the scents of yowls from the other side of the bush I knew thus must be the entrance of Thunderclan camp.

Mallowtail turned to us and spoke softly, "Stay sharp and stick close to you're clanmates, only break apart from you're group in a time of saving another cat or death." Mallowtail growled and I flicked my tail from side to side nervously.

Just then did the undergrowth on the side of us rumble and Finchstar came through. My heart almost leaped out of my chest but I managed to try to stay calm. "You're patrol first and we will attack from the other side of the camp clearing." Finchstar mewed before ducking back to her patrol who I guessed was on there way to the other end of Thunderclan camp.

I shook my head and unsheathed my claws, this would be a huge battle. If what Ashstar said was true and the whole rouges clan was here then with the help of all the clans we could drive the rouges away from the Mountain Range for good.

Mallowtail sniffed around the thorn bush for a few moments before

flicking his tail at a spot where we could barge threw and hopefully get in a surprise attack.

With one last look at his patrol and him sharing a nod with me Mallowtail yowled a battle cry, "Attack!"

The patrol dashed through the thorn bush and a cry of surprise was heard from a gray and black tom with scars on his legs that Mallowtail had tackled and pinned to the ground.

Cats turned away from their fighting to see the new comers racing into the clearing and lunging at the first cat they see.

I was shielded by the fury of fighting around me that no cat had lunged at me yet and I could look around the camp. I could not make out any dens because they had all been destroyed by the rouges.

At the far edge of the clearing Hazelberry and Mistcreek were with the elders and attempting to fight off the nasty rouges who batted at them and the elders.

One of the elders who I remembered was Shadenose was fighting off a familiar looking black she-cat with a bob tail and as the she-cat swiped at Shadenose I remembered her, *Bee!*

I hissed in rage and flung myself over the crowd of fighting cats. Bee was swiping pathetic blows at Shadenose as the elderly she-cat tried to defend herself but she was tired and couldn't fight off Bee as the young she-cat was faster then her.

I growled a warning yowl and lunged myself at Bee who looked surprised to see me but the rouges eyes didn't leave a surprised glare for long as the rouges seemed to have a fire of rage for me in her eyes.

I pinned down the rouge and threw a few blows at her face before she pushed me off with her back legs.

The bob tailed she-cat glared at me with eyes of fire and teeth bared like a hungry badger. She flung herself at me but I was quicker and met her mid lunge to knock her over.

These rouges were less skilled then warriors but there was lots of them. Bee gasped in surprise as I fastened my teeth in her scruff and with all of my strength flung her into the thorn bushes, "Don't disrespect a Mountain Range elder again!" I growled at Bee who laid down in the thorn bushes struggling to move as she got caught in them from squirming so much.

I turned my gaze back to Shadenose who nodded a thanks to me before hiding inside of the now destroyed elders den the best she could.

I turned around just in time to see a pale ginger and white she-cat with darker ginger stripes staring at me. I had seen her at gatherings and I realized it was the newly made Thunderclan warrior Cherryflare.

The pale ginger she-cat trotted over to me and gave me a nod of thanks before she took a spot in front of the elders den next to Hazelberry and Mistcreek who looked relieved to have a warrior with them.

I turned away from the elders den and scanned the clearing looking for a familiar calico when my eyes landed on her being pinned down by Swiftleap. Swiftleap had a force of his whole body holding down Hawk as she squirmed and hissed trying to get away from the older and stronger tom.

Suddenly a flash of dark ginger fur came from the spree of fighting cats and lunged its self at Swiftleap who went tumbling over and across the clearing. As the ginger fur halted and stared down at Swiftleap with murder in their eyes I realized that this must have been Hawks brother!

They looked the same when it came to markings and both of their eyes were sharp and clear. I couldn't remember if Hawk had ever told me her brothers name but any cat could look at the two of them side by side and know they are kin.

The dark ginger tom was on top of Swiftleap now snarling down at him with teeth sharper then thorns. Drool dripped from the dark ginger toms mouth and fell onto Swiftleap who was squirming

trying to get out from under the dark ginger tom.

Suddenly a yowl pierced the clearing and I looked behind me to see Finchstars patrol bursting through the thorn bushes while Ashstar followed behind them more slowly.

Some of the warriors quickly made their way towards their leader but it seemed like the rouges were trying to keep them away from Ashstar.

Flashleap was trying to get to Ashstars side but was stopped by Fang who tackled Flashleap to the ground.

Wolftalon and Bumblenose were also trying to get to their leader but were stopped by the gray and black tom from earlier, a black long furred she-cat with red eyes, and a dappled grey tom with aqua green eyes.

I stared at the rouges in confusion, it was as if she didn't want Thunderclan to be around their leader.

I turned back towards Swiftleap to see he was free and the dark ginger tom was staring ominously at Ashstar. Swiftleap was stunned and a reddish brown she-cat was approaching me with a look of gleam.

I raced over and blocked the reddish brown she-cats path and stared into her dark yellow eyes. The she-cat snarled and lunged at me with bared teeth and claws but I swerved to the side and as the she-cat was recovering from her leap I slammed into her side.

I hissed in pain as she sat stunned for a moment and I clawed furiously at her ears before she could attack me again. She hissed and knocked me away before sprinting at me again and successfully pinning me down.

I hissed and clawed at her face but her grip didn't loosen. The she-cat bent down her head so her mouth was right next to my ear and she whisper growled soft into my ear, "Its only a matter of time before you and all of you're pathetic clanmates are gone and the Mountain Range belongs to Ezekiel and Foxscar..." She mewed and I

hissed in rage before bucking out my back legs into her stomach causing her to hiss and leap away from me.

I hissed and lunged at the she-cat and knocked her down before sinking my teeth into her shoulder. The cat yowled in pain and tried to get away but I kept my teeth in his shoulder until I felt bone and ripping myself away.

The reddish brown she-cat squeaked as I let go and went dashing into the thorn barrier. I hissed proud of myself before looking around the clearing for any cat who may need my help when I was Ashstar being pushed into a corner by Hawks brother, Fang, and a black tom with darker gray stripes and a huge scar from his eyes down to his flank.

the three of them were hissing and growling at Ashstar but at trying to hurt him. Ashstar was backing away from him and seemingly trying to push around them but they wouldn't let him.

I wanted to know what they were hissing at Ashstar so I snuck around the fighting cats all around me and hid next to them in what smelt like the beaten up warriors den.

I perked my ears and listened closely as they spat and hissed at him, "Oh, what a pathetic excuse for a leader!" Hissed Fang and snapping at Ashstars muzzle. The black tom with darker gray stripes was on the side of the dark ginger tom while Fang was on the ginger toms other side.

"Yes he should just give up his leader ship to Ezekiel already!" Laughed the black tom with darker gray stripes. Fang nodded his agreement, "Yes, Foxscar, this cat couldn't even handle a apprentice speaking up to him at a gathering! Isn't that what that Blackpaw kit said?" Fang mewed and I stopped in my tracks.

Blackpaw..?!? How in the name of Starclan do they know Blackpaw and why was Blackpaw telling them about the night at the gathering and when?!?

I perked my ears to listen again. "Ezekiel, you're in charge now, you can make this pathetic *leader* do whatever you want him to do."

Hissed the black tom with darker gray stripes who I now knew was Foxscar.

Ezekiel was staring at Ashstar with a angry blank stare. The dark ginger tom flicked his tail annoyed and suddenly raised his unsheathed paw and struck down on to Ashstars eye.

The tom screamed in surprise and pain and backed further into the thorn bush, wrapping his tail over his paws like a kit wanting its mother. Fang and Foxscar laughed in Ashstars face and Ezekiel lowered his head so he was face to face with Ashstar, "Hand over you're leadership, you are not fit enough to lead this clan." Ezekiel growled and Ashstar coward more.

Just then A erupt of yowls broke into the clearing and from the scent I knew Shadowclan had just arrived. Thistlestar and Rosewillow flung themselves into battle seeming to be looking for the cat in charge.

The Shadowclan patrol had brought with them Talonclaw, Puddlespot, Oakstep, Nightpaw, Lilywhisper, Lakedance, Pinethistle, Thornpaw, and Shaderock.

Foxscar pushed toward and hissed in Ashstars face, "Say it! Say you're clan belongs to Ezekiel now and no one will get hurt!" Foxscar growled and raised his paw ready to strike down on Ashstar when the dark grey tom closed his eyes in fear and spoke in a raspy mew, "Fine! Fine! Thunderclan belong to you!" Ashstar mewed with a look of defeat.

Foxscar and Fang yowled in laughing at Ashstar while Ezekiel stared down at the Thunderclan leader with no emotion in his gaze.

The rouge leader closed his eyes and exhaled softly before turning towards the clearing of fighting cats, I raced out of my hiding spot towards my clanmates and watched as Ezekiel climbed on top of the meeting boulder in the center of the clearing.

"Silence!" Yowled Ezekiel and he waited for the cats to stop fighting while Foxscar and Fang joined him at the top of the meeting boulder.

Finchstar and Thistlestar yowled their rage up at Ezekiel but no cat continued to fight as every cat wanted to know what Ezekiel has to say.

"Cats of Rouges and cats of *clans*," he added with a sneer. "You're pathetic leader you decidedly follow, Ashstar just announced that he is no longer leader of his clan and gave the leadership to *me* instead. Every cat of Thunderclan now belongs to my group and any cat that tries to interfere will find their blood drawn. Any cat of thunderclan who tries to leave or even *defy* me will not be killed, as merciful as it may sound, but be punished in ways you would rather wonder." Ezekiel sneered with a flick of his tail.

The Thunderclan cat all around the clearing gasps and yowled their protests at Ezekiel but some turned to Ashstar with looks of hatred.

Hazelberry broke from the crowd and raced to Ashstar who was now sitting with his tail over his paws staring at the ground, "Ashstar this pathetic rouge must be lying! You wouldn't give up on you're clan like this?!?" Hazelberry pleaded and Ashstar refused to meet her gaze.

"I'm sorry but I am not fit to lead Thunderclan any longer, Ezekiel could make Thunderclan great. You all should follow under him..." Ashstar explained to his medicine cat who looked horrified.

"Traitor!" Yowled Yellowheart. "You don't deserve this clan or what we have done for you!" Yowled Wolftalon. "You should be ashamed of yourself you foxheart!" Hissed Brookwater.

The hatred yowls continued until Ezekiel hissed in order to silence the cats of Thunderclan, "Thunderclan now belongs to me! And I think we all agree that a traitor like Ashstar should leave our clan!" Ezekiel yowled and got many cats to yowl their agreement but many stayed quiet.

"Any cat who wishes not to be followed by me can leave with Ashstar!" Ezekiel yowled and waited to see which cats would join their old leader, but no cat did.

"This is not fair!" Yowled Finchstar stepping forward, "You are not a

clan cat and can never be one! You have no authority over Thunderclan or any clan!" Finchstar yowled and the rest of Skyclan followed their agreement.

Thistlestar came side to side with Finchstar, "Yes, no rouge has ever lead a warrior clan and he never will!" Yowled the black and white tom with red patches and Shadowclan yowled their agreements with their leader, but one cat didn't.

"Excuse me for stating the obvious but Thunderclans leader is nothing but a pathetic slung now, he can't lead his clan but Ezekiel can and he can make any clan more powerful then any of you pathetic warrior code trained cats could ever do!" Yowled a cat from the Shadowclan crowd and the newly made warrior, Shaderock, stepped out from the crowd.

Cats all around gasped at Shaderocks statement and Ezekiel let out a *mrrow* of laughter, "Shaderock, my friend, you can finally join us here! And where is the other one?" Ezekiel mewed scanning the clearing.

My heart lunged as I realized who he was talking about. A black cat stepped out from the thorn bush and trotted across the clearing towards the meeting boulder, "Blackpaw!" Yowled Finchstar.

Blackpaw gave the Skyclan leader a look of satisfaction before he jumped on top of the meeting boulder.

Fang laughed loudly, "You're clanmates all aren't so loyal?!? Aren't they Finchstar? Thistlestar?" The two clan leaders stared up at Shaderock and Blackpaw in surprise before angry yowls broke into the clearing.

A hush fell over the cats only when a new voice and scents surrounded the clearing, "What in Starclans name is going on here?!?" Yowled new voices and I turned my head to see Minnowstar being followed by a patrol of her clanmates.

Just behind them was Thymestar and a patrol of his clan, "What is the meaning of this?!? I get a apprentice busting into my camp telling of us a battle in Thunderclan territory! I wanna know what is

going on!" Yowled Thymestar and Minnowstar nodded her agreement.

Before any cat could reply Foxscar yowled in a raspy yowl, "The deal is that Thunderclan now belongs to the rouges!" Yowled Foxscar and was followed the the happy yowls of the while rouges clan.

I ducked away from my clanmates and got to Snowpebbles side, the gray tom looked like he had just seen a cat fall down from the skies.

I turned my head to see Leafpaw staring into the crowd of Shadowclan cats and I knew who she was looking at. I turned my gaze towards the happily yowling rouges and saw Hawk hiding in the back of the group, the calico was already staring at me with a look saying "I'm so sorry."

I wanted to run to Hawk and tell her I didn't blame her for anything of this but I knew I couldn't do that.

Will the clans ever be normal again.....?

***

a/n: guess who~ only the epilogue left ;) Stay tuned~

- Caption

Epilogue

5/4

Ezekiel opened his eyes, sunshine blinding his sight as he lifted his head. He was laying on the high ledge of the camp where the clan would have their so called "meetings". A soft purr left his throat as he stretched where he lay over the smooth rock. The sun bathed his dark pelt, soaking in the warmth.

Ezekiel raked his eyes over the camp, enjoying the view. The camp was big enough to not only hold a clan, but his group also. Cats mingled around the dens, fixing them in whatever they can. A patrol of three rouges walked into the camp, their jaws clamped rich with prey and Ezekiel felt a rush of joy at the sight.

Here, the prey was plentiful and he knew that no cat would go hungry. For now, at least. But at least it was nothing like their previous camp. The other camp was in a bogged, marshy wetland filled with rodents and wet air. It was clear that the group wasn't adapted to the hunting around the marshes, but the only place where they would be able to hunt was occupied with clan cats. And it was clear that they wouldn't go away so easily.

So, Ezekiel decided to give each clan a scare throughout the cold leaf-bare season where all cats would be weak. But the reason why he attacked the clans was mostly because they wouldn't be so keen on a few stragglers roaming their territory so he attacked each clan to see what their territory is like and if they were weak enough to be attacked.

Turns out, each clan were so beloved to their starclan and clan codes, finding the weakness of the clan wasn't as easy as catching a mouse. But who knew that there are cats who weren't so drawn to their ancestors and codes as if the whole world was built off of them.

Ezekiel's mind flashed back to when Shaderock and Blackpaw—

Blackstorm now—had come over to his group and came with information about the Moon Cave which intrigued Foxscar since he was on it for moons. The gray tom was practically obsessed with trying to get his paws on it but he hadn't be able to calculate a route to go there since it was wedged between the clan territories and the rocky pathway meant a dangerous journey there.

Ever since the encounter with the two clan cats, it had been one meeting after the other. Blackstorm and Shaderock had both agreed to find out any information's on the clan when Blackstorm told us about Thunderclan's position. Foxscar and Fang urged him to commence the attack on Thunderclan and soon enough here he was, thriving and warm.

Ezekiel sat on his haunches and slowly began to clean himself. He tired not to wince from the soreness his wounds were ever since the battle three days ago. The medicine cats, Hazelberry and Mistcreek were kind enough to treat everyone's wounds, much to my surprise —though that didn't mean they were any friendlier than the Thunderclan warriors.

The shock of Ashstar giving up his clan had shocked Thunderclan to their roots. It was as if their spirits and confidence for their clan had disappeared. A single choice making such an impact. Who knew.

The warriors kept to themselves, not daring to mingle with the rouves though the effort were futile at points. His cats would make sure to disrupt their day at *some* points.

And it could be anything. Anything to upset, annoy, anger, or even destroying any hope or confidence.

The only reason why the remaining cats of Thunderclan had any hope left was Flashleap. He was their supposedly leader anyway, and he *had* the confidence and rebellious character to stir up trouble and defy me or anyone. And if he was there, then his cats would stand with him.

Snarling suddenly awoke the air, and Ezekiel quickly got up from his spot, and padded over the the end if the ledge and sit down with his tail wrapped neatly around his paws.

Just below the High Ledge, was the fresh-kill pile. Or it use to be—now it lay in ruins with bits of flesh and bones scattered around and a rotten smell already wafting around the area. Ezekiel stifled a growl.

Beside the fresh-kill pile, there were two toms screeching and wrestling with each other. One of them was a tortoiseshell while the other was a dappled gray tom. The two were locked in combat, yowling and swiping at each other with claws unsheathe.

Ezekiel then remembered the tortoiseshell with brown spots was Thunderclan's former deputy of the clan, Flashleap. Deputies of the clan would mean that they would become leader after the leader dies and recieve their nine lives—or so Foxscar said.

What was his name? The long, matted furred ginger tom wondered about the dappled gray tom. *Was it Ranger? Oh, that old flea-bag who came begging to Foxscar and pleaded to be part of our group.* Ezekiel snorted at the memory. *He's good as useless.*

Ezekiel then shrugged it off, not really caring about the gray tom much. He wasn't important. His only focus was Flashleap. Ezekiel couldn't tell whether the tom was a threat or not to his group. He couldn't have his newly made group be jeopardized by a rebellious clan cat.

Flashleap raised his paw and slammed it down on Ranger's head with a terrifying force—enough to make him wail in pain

Ezekiel felt annoyed at the tom's reaction. *If he can't even fight properly, what's the point in defending him? He clearly needs to know how to fight his battles before someone saves him or otherwise he'll think someone else could fight* his *battle and there'll be no use of him.*

The skirmish between the two had gained everyone's attention. The Thunderclan cat's, who usually stay in their small group over to the side, now padded up close to the battle, their eyes fixed on Flashleap. Hope glittered in their eyes as they watched the fight.

The other cats of his group, though, watched the fight hungrily as if they wanted to sink their claws into Flashleap's pelt.

Fang tormed up the High Ledge with Foxscar following behind him. "Ezekiel," Fang greeted. Ezekiel didn't look at either of them, instead kept his gaze locked on the fighting cats but gave a nod of acknowledgement.

"Should we stop them?" Foxscar asked smoothly.

Ezekiel shook his head. "No. I want to see where this heads."

Ranger had now managed to writhe free from Flashleap's grip. He curled his lip at the tortoiseshell.

"That prey is mine," he snarled, showing his teeth.

Flashleap crouched to the ground, his gaze alighted with anger "you act like you're the only one ever eating anything from the fresh-kill pile! My mate needs to eat and here you idiotic rouges fattening yourselves with prey—more than you could eat!"

"If you're mate is so hungry, why doesn't she hunt for herself?" Ranger sneered.

"If she wasn't expecting kits, she would. But why don't *you* try hunting for yourself? Maybe that way we wouldn't be screeching over the same prey!"

Ranger let out a yowl and threw himself at Flashleap once more. He slashed his ears, and battered his hind leg against Flashleap's flank, leaving blood all over the ground, and skin and fur tufts everywhere.

Growling, Ezekiel stepped forward and lashed his tail. "Stop!" he commanded.

The two snarling cats stopped fighting and looked up at the High Ledge. Ezekiel could see the undisguised hatred burning in Flashleap's eyes and the fear glittering in Ranger's.

Scrambling down the High Ledge, Ezekiel padded up to the two battered cats with Foxscar and Fang trailing behind me.

"What's the meaning of this?" Ezekiel hissed icily.

Ranger glared at Flashleap ruefully. "He stole my prey."

The tortoiseshell showed his teeth. "You already had a fresh-kill! There are cats who need it more than your do."

"Oh, you mean your so called *elders?*" A white she-cat with gray spots, sneered. Her green eyes flashed with mock.

Snowflake, Ezekiel remembered the loyal she-cat who fought by his side. He gave a nod of acknowledgement toward her.

"You're telling us we should hunt more than we should eat but wouldn't that apply the same for them? They eat but don't contribute," she pointed out.

Before Flashleap could say something, a cat from standing near the Thunderclan group stepped forward with hateful hazel eyes. Her dappled gray coat shone in the sunlight.

"They did they're hunting moons ago," she snarled at Snowflake. Her eyes then flicked to Ezekiel. "They are retired now and they deserve as many moons of peace without *any* of you disrespecting them." She raised her chin and Ezekiel had to admire her confidence for standing up.

Flashleap turned to the gray she-cat, his eyes glowed with relief and gratefulness. "Thank you, Brookwater," he heard him murmur.

Ezekiel felt alarm pulsing under his pelt. *With Flashleap here, these cat's have a reason to keep defying me and anything we do.*

"There's no thing as 'retired' in our group," Fang yowled, stepping forward so that he stood right by my side. His eyes glittered with malice as he stared at the two Thunderclan cats.

"Remember you're no longer Thunderclan cats now, but now part of the rouges. Any previous traditions you may have done now no longer takes place. The only rule you follow are ours!"

A yowl of agreement exploded from the rouges while the Thunderclan cats let out furious snarls and hisses. Flashleap glared at Fang when he let out a screech of fury and sprang onto him,

claws slashing and teeth bared.

Fang let out a cry of surprise—both from shock and the force of Flashleap's attack. Ezekiel unsheathe his claws but he knew that his deputy wouldn't want any interference. And besides, Flashleap got himself into the fight. If he wanted one, he'll get one.

Foxscar would stood a couple of mouse-tail lengths away, now walked up beside me.

"You know," he murmured. "As long as Flashleap is here, he will continue fighting with us and have his own cats help him. Look, he already had one of them step up for him and the others are already looking like they want to step in. We have to do something."

Ezekiel flicked his ear. The shrieking and yowling filled the hollow, and cats jumped away as the two cats rolled on the ground, slicing and biting each other, and leaving blood stain marks on the dusty ground.

"What do you suggest?" He asked. Foxscar lashed his tail.

"We need to confine Flashleap. As long as he is still standing, the others will too. We need to destroy every bit of hope and confidence those Thunderclan cat'a have. And to do that, we need to make Flashleap our prisoner."

"Prisoner?" Ezekiel echoed.

Foxscar nodded. "That's right. By making him a prisoner they will listen to you. And every one who doesn't listen will get the same treatment."

The idea suddenly flashed through his mind and Ezekiel let out a purr of satisfaction. Getting up from where he had now sat, Ezekiel trotted up to the two writhing cats and lashed his paw out at Flashleap. The tom let out a screech of pain but at that moment Fang lunged at Flashleap and pinned him down.

"Fox-heart!" Flashleap snarled at Ezekiel but the dark ginger tom didn't bat an eye. Ezekiel flicked his tail at Fang, motioning him to get off of Flashleap then padded right up to him.

"For your actions today, I have decided that you shall no longer be treated like one of us," Ezekiel mewed calmly.

"You never treated us like one of *yours*," Flashleap spat which only earned a slash to the ear from Fang. The tortoiseshell growled in pain but didn't lower his head.

Ezekiel continued. "And for continuing to disobey your leader, I have decided you have disregarded my trust and will now be a prisoner within the camp."

Gasps of horror came from the Thunderclan group while hisses of approvement came from the rouges.

"You will no longer be able to leave the camp nor talk with other cats. You will spend your time—until I decided you are ready to join our group—in that den over there."

Ezekiel pointed his muzzle to the small makeshift den of thorns and brambles. The rouges were making extra den and that one was incomplete so it would make a perfect place to keep a prisoner.

"*What?!?*" Flashleap sprang to his paws while Brookwater leaped forward, her eyes blazing.

"You can't do that!" she shrieked.

"Oh yes he can," Foxscar purred walking up to Brookwater and staring her down, his chin tipped down to stare at her small frame. A ginger tom with white—Bumblenose—legs thrust himself forward and pressed against the dappled gray she-cat and hissed at Foxscar.

"He's our leader," Foxscar continued, turning his head and staring at the cats around them. "He can do whatever he wants when someone disrespects him."

Turning away from Brookwater and the ginger tom, Foxscar padded up to Flashleap. "In fact, you've done *more* than disrespect Ezekiel—you attacked the deputy when he did nothing to you. Not only are you going to be confined into that den, but not receive any prey unless you are given."

"No!" Brookwater wailed, backing away from Foxscar in horror. Her ears were laid flat against her head and her claws were digging into the ground. Bumblenose pressed himself against Brookwater and let out a seething snarl.

Ezekiel felt his pelt prickle, wondering if he should allow such thing to happen. But then again, he trusted Foxscar's word. He knew that keeping a length to his leadership authority meant not allowing cats to step over him and put them in their place.

Foxscar raised his tail and flicked his tail, motioning two cats to come over. Half-face, a muscular light brown tom with a half shredded face and Snowflake walked up to the gray tabby tom and listen to whatever he said.

At times, Ezekiel felt as if Foxscar and Fang ran the group. They would order cats around and have the entitlement of doing so but never questioned him twice. It annoyed him when they acted as if they had more authority than him but Ezekiel knew what the worth was if he confronted them. One thing that both of the toms fear was Ezekiel. A ruthless, young cat who cared for no one—except Hawk—and wouldn't think twice at ripping you apart.

Was that the reason why they never crossed me? Ezekiel couldn't help but wonder. He let out a low growl of warning. Foxscar lifted his head and looked at him before dipping his head, taking a few steps back.

"Take Flashleap to his den," Ezekiel ordered to Half-face and Snowflake. "And then one of you guard him—make sure he doesn't stir up trouble."

The two nodded and nudged the tortoiseshell a hard nudge, gesturing him to get up, and then shoved him toward the den. Flashleap stumbled as they pushed his weight around, not even allowing him once

"I can walk!" he snarled but the two ignored him and continued pushing him toward the den. Suddenly, a shrill wail exploded from the hollow. Ezekiel tensed, his claws unsheathing. *Is it an attack?* he wondered, alarmed by the cry.

Just then, a cream tabby she-cat stepped shoved her way into the front of the crowd, her round belly swinging. She stared after Flashleap, her eyes wide with distress. "No! You can't take away the father of my kits," she cried. "You *can't!"*

"Sandstep," Brookwater pleaded to the cream cat, trying to nudge the she-cat away but Sandstep stayed firm, her eyes wild with worry and love. *Love.*

"He disobeyed me," Ezekiel told the cream cat gently, trying to ignore the gnawing feeling in his stomach.

"He disobeyed you? Or did he tried to stand up for the last thing he has?" Sandstep stared at him. "If he dies and my kits never see's their father, I'll never forgive you! Never! These kits should not be born into trauma nor should they have to hear their mother tell them their father died! They're too young," she snarled. Her eyes raked over him and the rouges before she whirled around and stormed into the Nusery.

Ezekiel felt his fur prickle with guilt. Even if Flashleap had deserved what he did, that didn't mean his kits should go through the same trauma. Ezekiel felt a memory of him being a kit, stranded, alone, with no one there for him. He stared after Sandstep.

Fang curled his lip beside him. "Maybe it'll teach the kits how to be obedient and behave."

Ezekiel ignored him, and instead turned away from the scene that had been created and padded up to the High Ledge. A flash of jealousy tore through him as he sat down and began grooming his unruffled pelt.

Sandstep's kits would have a mother who will always be there for them and a father who would love them nonetheless if whatever happens to him. So why did such thing never happen to him? What makes these spoiled cats so special? They have everything they ever want.

Loving parents, clanmates, a leader, friends, lovers, home, prey. Anything one could possibly hope. Yet, the clans act like any cat

from the outside are the same when really it's cats with trauma—their only hope to a cat who can keep those pain away. Treated nothing more than fox dung while the clan cats believed them to be the best.

Ezekiel felt bitterness sweep inside him. Fang had padded up the rockaway and sat down beside him.

"Ezekiel?" he called, his voice icy and smooth just like when a stream freezes over.

"I've been thinking," the dark ginger said, ignoring Fang's greeting. "Why do we have to keep suffering like this? All this time, the clans have bullied us into living on the edge of their territories, treated like outcasts. We're constantly being preyed like some mice with no other function than to fear for their life and hope not to be caught but—three days ago we proved that we no longer have to be hunted."

Ezekiel turned to Fang who was leaning forward, his ears pricked and eyes gleaming, clearly interested in whatever he had to say. He continued.

"We've proven that we are stronger than we think—for sake, we took over a clan! So why do we have to keep hiding? Why do we have to keep being the prey. Well, that's done. Change of plans, we're no longer the prey, meek and small, hiding in the corners. We're now the hunters, ready to defend and kill what it ours. What needs to be ours to survive. Clearly, the clan's aren't the only ones willing to do that and their small brains can't suffice that."

Fang let out a purr of satisfaction, his tail lashing. "I agree. It's time we rouges take a stand to survive, and no one will stand in our way for that—if they do, they'll wish they hadn't."

Ezekiel nodded, pleased. He turned his head to the sun that was now mid-sky and felt the warm rays sinking into his pelt. He blinked into the midst, his mind whirling with excitement.

They wanted a battle?

We'll give them war.

***

a/n: annnnndddd there ya have it folks! the very last chapter of A Trail of Darkness. Whew, this has been one long journey. wow—never would i ever have thought of finishing the first book of our first series.

thank you so much for all the support! all those views meant so much to us, i would've never thought our book would reach 1k views, but it did so thank you all for making to the end of the journey!

we have one more chapter that will wrap everything up! see you there <3

- Fox/Cloudy

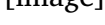
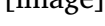
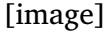
[☆]

And there you have it, the last chapter for A Trail of Darkness! This book has been a long and hard journey of two online friends being like "let's write some angst and gay cats bc why not 🤷" Beware this is not the end, Silentpaw and Leafpaw will return soon. Me and foxy have decided we will get some chapters done first before we publish book two. Tho, we are not sure of when it will be out because of my upcoming school year, but I will try my best to get chapters out early bc when I start up a new book I'm usually pumped with motivation! So stayed tuned for that my dears also if you want to stay updated with the book updates, get updates on how chapters are going, and possible future events you should join our discord server and follow our Instagram! Both links are in our bio! Have a lovely day/night :)
—Caption

sniffles and wipes tears
My goodness, that was the most longest journey ever. Who would've thought one day that Caption and I would've finished this book. Past me would've laughed. We started this book on January 23rd and now it's been 6 months till we finished it. But no worries, our journey with Leafpaw and Silentpaw does not end here. For Book 2, we'll have the A/n and Allegiance posted but nothing will be posted as Caption said. That being said, school is starting soon and when it does posting chapters will be *much* slower unlike for Book 1 where we posted weekly.

We hope you enjoyed Book 1 but sit tight as we'll shortly start Book 2, see y'all there! <3
—Foxy

Here are some previous book covers for Book 1.

*****ALL BOOKS ARE FOUND ON GOOGLE/PINTEREST *****

Tell us which one you guys like or prefer!